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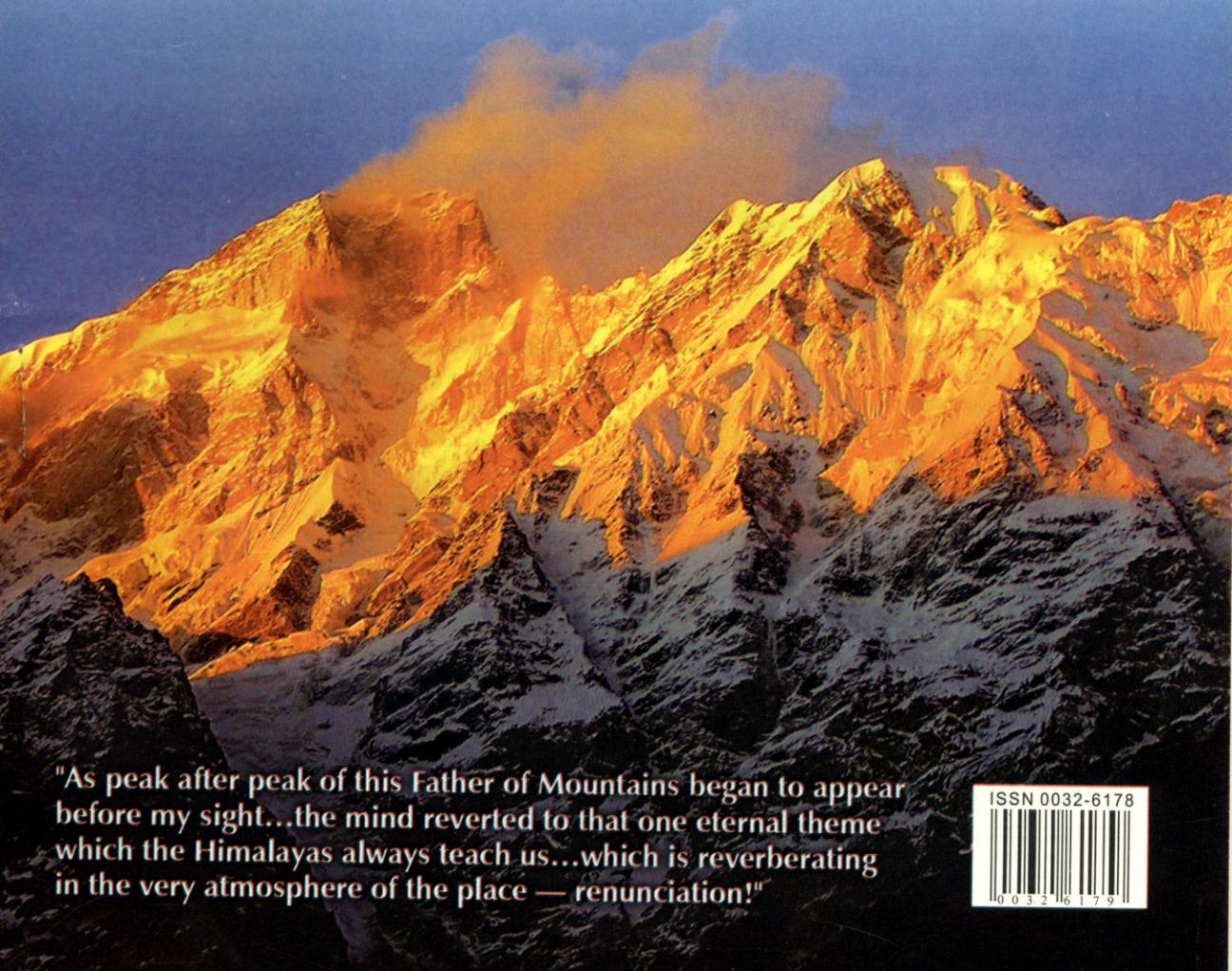
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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



"As peak after peak of this Father of Mountains began to appear before my sight...the mind reverted to that one eternal theme which the Himalayas always teach us...which is reverberating in the very atmosphere of the place — renunciation!"

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MAY 2006

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Cover: Sunset over the Garhwal range, Himalayas, with Swami Vivekananda's quotation in the foreground.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 111

MAY 2006

No. 5

Traditional Wisdom

SEVĀ: SERVICE

मोदमन्नं विन्दते अप्रचेताः सत्यं ब्रवीमि वध इत्स तस्य ।
नार्यमणं पुष्यति नो सखायं केवलाधो भवति केवलादी ॥

The foolish man, who offers it neither to God nor to his fellow men, acquires food in vain. I speak the truth—it verily is his death; (for) the lonely eater is a lonely sinner.
(Rig Veda, 10.117.6)

एतावज्जन्मसाफल्यं देहिनामिह देहिषु । प्राणैरर्थेर्धिया वाचा श्रेय एवाचरेत्सदा ॥

Human life in this world is meaningful and fruitful only to the extent that one's energies, wealth, intelligence, and speech are unceasingly utilized for the welfare of others.
(Bhagavata, 10.22.35)

श्रोत्रं श्रुतेनैव न कुण्डलेन दानेन पाणिन् तु कङ्कणेन ।
विभाति कायः खलु सज्जनानां परोपकारेण न तु चन्दनेन ॥

The ears are made pleasing by listening to the scriptures, not by earrings; hands through charity, not by bracelets; and the person of the noble ones through service to others, not by sandal-perfume.

Ye fools! Who neglect the living God,
And His infinite reflections with which the world is full.
While ye run after imaginary shadows,
That lead alone to fights and quarrels,
Him worship, the only visible!
Break all other idols! (Swami Vivekananda)

If one serves the sick and the distressed in the right spirit, in one single day one can get the highest spiritual realization. (Swami Turiyananda)

This Month

This number is the first of a two-issue focus on disaster response. The editorial, **Confronting Disaster: The Ramakrishna Mission Perspective**, introduces some of the salient features of the Ramakrishna Order's approach to relief and rehabilitation in times of disaster.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features miscellaneous news, including reports of the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and a famine in Japan.

Relief and Rehabilitation: A Humanitarian Approach towards Coping with Natural Disasters is a formal outline of the ideology and methodology of the Ramakrishna Mission's relief programmes. Presented at the 78th Indian Science Congress at Indore in January 1991, this paper has been authored by Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, presently Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

The uniqueness of the Ramakrishna Order's approach to relief and rehabilitation lies in its philosophy of service derived from its inspirational founders and underscored in the relief services rendered by its pioneer members. This has been highlighted by Swami Gopalanandaji of the Department of Relief, Ramakrishna Mission Headquarters, Belur Math, Howrah, in **Ramakrishna Mission Relief: Approach, Philosophy and Inspiration**.

The Ramakrishna Mission has undertaken hundreds of relief and rehabilitation operations against more than thirty different types of natural and man-made disasters and deprivations. **Ramakrishna Mission's Disaster Response: An Overview** is a synoptic look at some of the major post-disaster services of the Order over the last one hundred years. Not

only does it give an idea of the growth in volume and extent of these services, but it also gives an account of how these have evolved to address wider human needs.

Disasters bring us face to face with the tragic side of human destiny. But they also present images of courage and resilience, of dignity and altruism. They show how worsted human beings can bounce back to better their lives, how genuine love and human sympathy can mitigate even the worst of human afflictions. The real-life vignettes in **The Human Touch** bring these facets into sharp focus.

If the devastation wreaked by the Gujarat earthquake of January 2001 had few precedents in recent times, the relief and rehabilitation carried out in its wake has been widely appreciated for its promptness, comprehensiveness and futuristic approach. Sri Sudhir Kumar, former Team Leader and Senior Executive with Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority, provides us an overview in **Gujarat Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Programme: Lessons Learnt**.

The rich panorama of mythology, ritual and local tradition that has come to be associated with Buddhism in Tibet has fascinated both the devotee and the scholar. **Birds in Buddhist Sacred Texts** is an interesting ethno-ornithological study of some Tibetan texts by Dr Suruchi Pande, Researcher in Sanskrit, Jnanaprabodhini Institute, Pune.

In the second instalment of **Ramakrishna: His Name and the Science of Japa**, Swami Chetananandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, discusses the method of japa, the way to cultivate taste for japa and Sri Ramakrishna's love for the Divine Name.

Confronting Disaster: The Ramakrishna Mission Perspective

EDITORIAL

There were days when a thousand people would be brought in trucks and 'unloaded' at our camp, much like cattle. On one day twelve hundred people were brought. Of these, nine hundred died. They had arrived when on the verge of death. Seeing all this, I thought that I would go mad. It was simply intolerable! Tired after the day's hard work at the camp, I would return to our resting place and sit down alone. It would be quiet all around, as if it were a cremation ground. Occasionally, a distant wail would break the silence. It gives me a shiver even now.

Though the above scene is set in the Second World War, and could easily pass for a description of a Nazi concentration camp, it is actually a first-hand account of the grim realities of a Ramakrishna Mission refugee-relief camp at Dimapur in Nagaland. The narrator is Swami Bhuteshananda, who was managing the camp against heavy odds. As we read his account we come face to face with a feature that is central to all relief activity—the human touch. Yet this is one element that we are hardly ever able to get across to our readers as we file relief reports in our journal, month after month, typing out the numbers of people served, the weights and numbers of relief material distributed and the money spent—cold statistics, which give little idea of the warmth as well as the pathos that underscores the human interaction involved in all relief and rehabilitation efforts.

In focusing on disaster response in this and the following number, we hope to highlight some of these experiential elements even as we take a broad look at some of the important aspects of disaster management and try to contextualize the efforts of the Ramakrishna Order in this field.

As we look back at the relief and rehabilitation work done by the Ramakrishna Mission over the last nearly hundred and ten years, we notice a steady rise in the volume and extent of these efforts—in the numbers served and the money and materials expended. The Order has not only kept pace with the latest thinking in disaster management but has also played a leading role in many areas, both in terms of technical expertise and management of resources. Yet it is the focus on the human aspects, the stress on service as worship and the adherence to certain basic principles (as highlighted in several articles in this issue) that has defined the Order's approach through all these years, and still determines its focus.

The fundamental spirit underlying the Order's approach comes through in a letter that Swami Saradananda, the first General Secretary of the Order, wrote to a monastic member conducting relief. 'You are distributing people's money to [the distressed] people; what is your own that you are giving? You should give your heart, mind and soul, and love.' It is this 'love' that caught the eye of the reputed historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar, who wrote about the Calcutta plague of 1899: 'When the sweepers had fled away, [I] chanced upon a white woman one day, clearing the streets with broom and basket in hand. This was none other than Nivedita.' Again, 'If the stench of garbage accumulated in a narrow lane repelled even the practised sweepers, [another disciple, Sadananda] would nonchalantly snatch the basket and spade from one of them and set about removing the decomposed heap till the sweepers too would step forward. ... At the end, he would congratulate them and embrace them warmly, regardless of

their social distance or dirty bodies. Or if there was an uncared for patient he would hug him and nurse him to recovery.'

Conscientious use of 'people's money' was also reflected in the meticulous care with which all work was carried out. In 1897, Swami Trigunatitananda, while covering 84 drought-stricken villages single-handedly, would go from door to door to determine the needs of each family, keep records, and distribute rice according to individual needs. His methods, which led Swami Vivekananda to remark, 'I am much pleased to see the orderliness of Sarada's [Swami Trigunatitananda] work', are still followed by the Order's workers.

In 1921, about 2,500 tea-estate workers from Assam were stranded at Chandpur in Tripura and political leaders were trying to extract mileage by keeping them there. Soon, unhygienic conditions led to an outbreak of cholera and the Ramakrishna Mission had to provide relief. Swami Saradananda provided strict instructions to the monastic in charge of the relief: 'You have gone to serve the *daridra narayana*, and should do whatever is necessary to accomplish that. You have not gone there to indulge in politics, and we too haven't sent you for that.' In keeping with these instructions the sick were nursed, over 800 indigent workers were provided monetary aid, and another 350 helped with tickets to travel ahead. This clear distinction between politics and service is another important feature of the Order's approach, and this has often been of great help to the beneficiaries in times of political strife.

In 1918, massive floods inundated the Rajshahi district of north Bengal and the Ramakrishna Mission conducted relief in 326 villages for about three months. After the relief services were closed, some organizations criticized the Mission for premature termination of services. Swami Saradananda's rejoinder read: 'Given the many years of experience that the Mission has in the field of service, it is well aware when to start relief and when to end it. Those who wish to pursue such activities on a long-term

basis must acquire greater experience.' We get an elaboration of this cryptic statement in the paper presented by Dr D N Maitra, a founder member of the Bengal Social Service League, at the Ramakrishna Math and Mission Convention, 1926: 'Our relief operations should be that of just helping one, who is struck down, to stand on one's legs and rendering only such help as would not impair one's self-respect and spirit of self-help. If we do more we may not only do one an indirect disservice but may be using the funds at the expense of others who may be in greater need of just that help elsewhere or in the future.'

In 1936, Swami Lokeshwarananda led a 25-member relief team from the Mission's headquarters at Belur Math to the quake-affected Cheduba island of Burma. The victims were notorious for banditry and the government officials had been scared away by their ferocity. Immediately after their arrival on the island, Swami Lokeshwarananda called a meeting of the local leaders and said, 'We have come here after hearing that a great calamity has befallen you all. We wish to serve you. If you permit and cooperate with us, only then can we serve you.' One of the leaders, U Mong Ba, offered them a place and soon the other tribals became very friendly and cooperative. When the group left after having provided provisions and medical care for six months and having constructed dwellings, the tribals were in tears. Some personal worries had been troubling Swami Lokeshwarananda before he took up this work. While handing him this assignment, Swami Madhavananda, then Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, had said, 'Thinking about other people's sorrows and problems is the way to forget your own worries.' This was not a prescription for opium. For not only does the spirit of worship underlying the Mission's activities strike resonant chords in the hearts of those who are served, it also leads to genuine human and spiritual transformation of those who serve. In providing the human touch, we ourselves are touched.

*

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

May 1906

News and Miscellanies

A SHOCK of earthquake at five o'clock in the morning of April 18th, lasting three minutes, followed by a fire the next day has destroyed nearly two-thirds of San Francisco. Three hundred thousand people have been left homeless and destitute. The extent of mortality (given in some accounts as five thousand) remains quite uncertain. Competent valuers estimate the total losses approximately at sixty million sterling of which thirty five are insured. The burned area is $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles by $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles. It is reported that Terminal Island and other sea-side resorts have been destroyed by a tidal wave.

Thousands of people are living on roots and leaves of trees mixed with small quantities of rice and flour, writes Mr. Hiller, Consul-General at Yokohama, in a report on the famine in Japan. He states that over half a million people are now facing extreme conditions. The only means of sustenance they have are ground acorns, roots, leaves and barks of trees.

DR. Creighton attributes the prevalence of plague to insanitary tenements. The solution of the problem depends on the supply of good and cheap bricks, but these cannot be had so long as the cost of fuel for brick manufacture remains as prohibitive as it is now. The *Indian Engineering* traces the evil directly to the avarice of the forest conserving agency.

MR. Jonathan Hutchinson, who is well known as a great authority on the subject, has published through Messrs. Constable, a volume 'On Leprosy and Fish-Eating: a Statement of Facts and Explanations.' The object of the work is to carry conviction to his readers that the fundamental cause of the malady known as 'true leprosy' is the eating of fish in a state of commencing decomposition. He has studied the subject in different parts of the world, and supports his contentions by a large amount of evidence.

AT present in India there are no less than 13 bone mills, 23 breweries, 25 carpet-factories, 132 cotton-mills, 73 cotton-presses, 47 cotton-gins, 20 distilleries, 34 flour mills, 47 ice-factories, 28 iron-works, 34 jute-mills, 21 jute-presses, 11 lime and stone works, 12 mica works, 56 oil-mills, 10 paper-mills, 8 petroleum companies, 13 potteries, 26 rice-mills, including those of Burma, 10 rope-works, 28 saw-mills, 16 silk-factories, 17 sugar-factories, 17 tanneries, 11 tobacco-factories, and 7 woollen mills.

AT last China and England have come to a definite understanding about the doings and claims upon Tibet of the Indian Government. A formal treaty has been signed at Pekin which prevents interference of Great Britain in the domestic affairs of Tibet so long as other Powers keep their hands off. China has decided to pay the indemnity in three yearly instalments of $8\frac{1}{3}$ lakhs each, the first having become due on 1st January last. According to the terms of the treaty the money is to be payed at Gyantse in cash or cheque.

Relief and Rehabilitation

A Humanitarian Approach towards Coping with Natural Disasters

SWAMI ATMASTHANANDA

Introduction

Ever since the dawn of civilization, humans have always been struggling to control nature and environment. In fact, gaining complete mastery over nature may justly be termed the goal of human life. This has been succinctly expressed by Swami Vivekananda in one of his memorable utterances: 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.' While controlling internal nature falls under the purview of religion and spirituality, the study of external nature forms the subject of science and technology.

Natural disasters like earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis and floods, with their widespread destructive power and ruthless devastating effects, have always posed formidable problems to the progress of human society. Over and over again, the terrible scourges of nature have caused colossal damage to and utter chaos within vast populations in the twinkling of an eye. Obviously, this tragic state of affairs should not be allowed to continue: all possible steps will have to be taken to put an end to it. The magnitude of the problem, however, is so stupendous that it cannot be tackled by a small group of individuals or a particular section of society. Rather, it calls for an all-out effort from everyone concerned. It is, therefore, befitting that the Indian Science Congress Association has arranged for a common forum for exchanging views of experts from different professions of life. The topic of discussion has become all the more significant since the United Nations has declared the present decade [1991-2000] to be the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR).

Achievements and Limitations of Modern Science and Technology

Modern science and technology with their epoch-making inventions, progressive researches, computerized gadgets and improvised techniques have achieved unparalleled success in the history of humankind. No doubt we are now much better off in coping with natural disasters as opposed to the days of yore. Advanced meteorological devices, improved communication systems and fast transportation facilities have now made it possible to forecast, in many cases, a forthcoming calamity, issue warning notices to concerned individuals, and shift them to safer places well ahead of the catastrophe. This has enabled us to achieve considerable reduction in the loss of human lives and cattle, though the forecasts are not always accurate and are unable to cover all types of calamities. For example, earthquakes occur all of a sudden without giving any scope for accurate anticipatory warning. Moreover, there are certain places situated in seismic zones where earthquakes occur over and over again. Thus tragic devastations have recurred in Munger (Bihar), Cachar (Assam), and Kachchh (Gujarat)—to name just a few!

Tidal waves (or tsunamis) too form another category of dreadful natural disasters which are capable of causing colossal damage within a very short span of time. In 1977, one such tidal wave invaded the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh. A vast eighteen-foot-high sheet of water arose from the sea and came several miles inland, accompanied by a terrible cyclone, submerging and carrying away by the force of its swift current almost everything in its course. Though advance information was re-

ceived prior to the catastrophe, it could not be communicated to the distant coastal villages and so there was huge loss of human life and cattle. However, the cyclone and floods which struck the same regions of Andhra Pradesh in 1990 could not cause much damage to life since, this time, repeated warnings were issued and precautionary measures were taken well ahead of time. Of course, the loss of standing crops and much valuable property could not be avoided.

It is very interesting to note the significant role that rain plays in human destiny. On the one hand, scarcity of rain during the appropriate season results in tragic droughts; on the other, excessive rains also ruin crops and thereby bring untold suffering to farmers. Thus we have witnessed prolonged droughts in Gujarat, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Orissa, and even in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, whereas continued rain for long periods has caused great havoc in these very places on other occasions. If scientists and technologists attack this problem with greater earnestness, we hope some practical solution can be worked out, rather than hopelessly surrendering to the whims of the 'rain god'.

Unplanned development, ill effects of certain projects, and ecological imbalance often make for fresh natural disasters. While constructing huge dams, the problem of removing the extra silt deposited on the river bed is seldom considered. The normal flow of the river is checked by the obstructing dam, and the resultant silt deposit reduces the depth of the river. This gives rise to flash floods in certain areas as soon as there is heavy rain for a few consecutive days. For instance, floods have become almost an annual ritual in Moyna of Midnapore, Khanakul of Hooghly, Amta of Howrah and Kaliachak of Malda districts in West Bengal.

Many of the embankments constructed recently have often been found to give way, either due to faulty design or on account of improper construction or negligent maintenance. Breaches in such embankments not only inun-

date huge areas of agricultural land but also endanger the lives of many who mistake their sides to be safe places for habitation. For example, during the 1978 floods in West Bengal, the horseshoe embankment at Bali-Dewanganj near Arambagh of Hooghly district suddenly collapsed. As a result, the spate in River Dwarakeshwar, an otherwise gentle river, submerged the adjoining areas within a very short time, ruining all local dwellings, including reinforced-concrete structures. In addition, sand was deposited over vast stretches of cultivable land to heights of six to eighteen feet. Such instances can easily be multiplied.

Thus we find that despite the wonderful achievements of modern science and technology we are not yet in a position to eliminate natural disasters. Taking for granted that this is an inevitable feature in our lives, we will have to equip ourselves so as to minimize human suffering and material losses as much as possible. Herein lies the importance of adopting effective relief measures at the hour of need.

Relief Is the Need of the Hour

Whenever any catastrophe strikes, it leaves dreadful scars on the face of the earth. The affected people, uprooted from their hearth and home, become dazed, not knowing what to do next. The most important need at that critical hour is not only to provide them with food and essential items of daily use, but also to extend the warmth of feeling human hearts to give them back their lost individuality. It is extremely urgent to be by their side at that time and help them restore their trust and confidence in themselves. This is why the proverb says, 'Late relief is no relief.' For, if we are late in approaching the affected people, we shall find that the disaster has already taken its full toll and we have nothing left to do.

If prior intimation is available regarding the possibility of a natural disaster, relief work can be organized even before the catastrophe. Care should be taken to avoid creating undue panic among the people, and to 'educate' them

to face the calamity with courage and poise. If necessary, they should be helped to evacuate to safer areas and special attention needs to be given to children and mothers.

In those cases where calamity strikes without any warning, relief services have to follow immediately. Usually, food and clothing constitute the principal items of relief. These materials are to be distributed judiciously depending upon the actual need as well as the exigencies of the particular situation. It should be remembered that as soon as the effect of the havoc subsides, people should be encouraged to resume their normal livelihood. Prolonged relief often turns the beneficiaries into professional beggars. This should be avoided with utmost vigilance.

Hygiene and sanitation constitute another important aspect of relief. Following a devastation, when people are forced into an unhygienic environment and abnormal living conditions, spread of disease and epidemic outbreaks are very common. This worsens the situation and adds to the problems of the unfortunate sufferers. However, such outbreaks can be considerably reduced by observing at least a minimum of health rules and insisting on pure drinking water. 'Impure water and impure food are the cause of all maladies.' If the situation does not permit water to be boiled before drinking, water-purifying tablets may be used to render the water bacteria-free. Likewise, other basic health rules should be observed and implemented.

The extent of damage caused by any major natural calamity is usually so huge that the government departments, particularly in India, are incapable of handling the entire relief operations without the help and cooperation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Hence, for providing effective relief services to the maximum number of people, the role of voluntary agencies is extremely significant. Unfortunately, different organizations, in spite of their noble motives, often end up causing confusion and discord due to communication gaps and lack of cooperation. There are many in-

stances where some people get 'double relief' while others go without any relief! Again, at times a few over-enthusiastic groups with little experience in relief work cause unpleasant consequences, thereby defeating the very purpose of relief. These problems can, of course, be resolved by holding occasional meetings between all the participating institutions, preferably under the aegis of the concerned government offices. The affected areas should be allocated to one group or another, depending upon their capacity and willingness. Periodic progress reports should be obtained from each group so as to have an integrated control of the entire relief operations.

The government machinery should, no doubt, take the lion's share of the relief activities. Nevertheless, the participation of voluntary agencies, and through them the active involvement of the people at large, serves as a morale booster to society. It is through selfless and loving relief services that people can express their fellow feeling, which is an essential feature of a great civilization.

Among the various voluntary organizations engaged in relief services, Ramakrishna Mission is one which has been bestowed with immense goodwill and has gained enormous popularity due to its uninterrupted dedicated services for well over nine [now ten] long decades, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, or political alignments. The secret of its singular success lies in its adherence to the unique ideology and living inspiration derived from Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

The Ideology of Ramakrishna Mission Relief Services

Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of the modern age, raised certain pertinent questions: 'If God can be worshipped through a clay image, then why not through a man?' 'Does God exist only when I think of Him with my eyes closed? Doesn't He exist when I look around with my eyes open?' Later Sri Ramakrishna himself an-

swered these questions by expounding his wonderful doctrine of 'service to man as worship of God'. He said, 'Talk of compassion for beings! Insignificant creatures that you are, how can you show compassion to beings? Who are you to show compassion? You wretch, who are you to bestow it? No, no; it is not compassion to jivas but service to them as Shiva.'

Indeed Sri Ramakrishna has brought a new gospel of service based on the immanence of God and the divinity of the human soul. This new spiritual humanism has not only opened a new way of God-realization but has also revolutionized man's attitude towards his fellow men. It has made life meaningful to innumerable people and has given them hope, courage and a sense of worth.

This ideology was put into practice by Sri Ramakrishna himself as early as in the second half of the nineteenth century. He started relief services at Vaidyanath Dham while he was on a pilgrimage to Varanasi. Again, in 1870, he initiated drought-relief work at Kalaighata in the present Nadia district of West Bengal. The first organized relief work of the Ramakrishna Mission, however, was started by Swami Akhandanandaji, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, on 15 May 1897 at Murshidabad. 'To get the work started Swami Vivekananda sent Rs150 along with two monastic workers ... Swami Akhandananda distributed rice to 18 famine-stricken persons. Thus began the organized Relief Service of the Ramakrishna Mission. Indeed this was a historic day.'

The day was all the more significant because it was, perhaps, the first organized relief work by any voluntary organization in India. 'This work, besides bringing relief and succour to suffering humanity, helped to release the dormant and sluggish national energy and made it flow through the channel of social service. Since then the Ramakrishna Mission has been carrying on the relief work uninterruptedly in different parts of India. As it is spread all over our huge country, many people fail to see the vastness of the work that the Mission has

been carrying on year after year silently and unostentatiously.'

A summary of these activities has recently [1988] been published in a pictorial report of relief services. The experience gathered through many years of dedicated service has enabled the Ramakrishna Mission to develop a methodology by which relief services can be organized in the most efficient manner and at very short notice.

The Improved Methodology

As soon as a major calamity occurs in any part of the country, the Ramakrishna Mission immediately rushes relief material to the worst-affected areas. At the outset a preliminary survey is conducted so as to assess the nature and extent of the damage done as well as to find out the immediate need of the affected people. Usually, food materials—dry or cooked—constitute one of the primary items of distribution. In places where large numbers of people are rendered homeless by the fury of nature, kitchens are opened to serve khichri (boiled rice and pulses mixed with spices and vegetables) among the distressed. In other places, dry doles such as rice, wheat flour, pulses, salt, vegetables, etc. are distributed. After a few days, when the flood waters recede or the debris of the ruins are removed, our monastics and volunteers conduct a comprehensive survey, prepare a list of people needing help and organize the distribution of saris, dhotis, children's garments, adults' clothes, blankets, cooking utensils and other items of domestic use among the needy, irrespective of caste, creed or religion. Wherever necessary, teams of doctors and paramedical staff are kept engaged in treating patients and supplying necessary medicines free of charge. The aim is to enable the beneficiaries to go back to their normal livelihood in the shortest possible time.

The sequence of primary-relief operations, as outlined above, is followed by economic rehabilitation wherever required. Sudden natural calamities may deprive farmers,

craftsmen and traders of their respective sources of income and render them utterly helpless. Attempts are therefore made to help them start their lives anew. For example, selected seeds and fertilizers are supplied to affected farmers, appropriate tools and equipment are given to artisans, and some initial merchandise is provided for helpless traders. Of course, the list of beneficiaries is prepared after conducting a door-to-door survey and carefully assessing the actual damage as well as the credibility of the victim.

After completion of primary relief, rehabilitation projects are taken up whenever a large number of houses, schools or other structures of community use are damaged or demolished in the devastation. Usually low-cost housing projects are implemented, keeping in view the local environmental conditions, the economic status of the beneficiaries and their capacity for future maintenance. Bamboo, timber, bricks or pre-cast cement panels are used for erecting walls, and straw, country tiles, G.I. sheets, asbestos cement sheets, precast panels or reinforced cement concrete are used as roofing-material. The material and design used in a given situation are determined by various factors like local resources, meteorological condition, availability of funds, etc. These rehabilitation projects not only include construction of residential quarters, community hall-cum-shelter houses, school buildings, temples, etc. but also extend to sinking tube wells, digging reservoirs, constructing overhead tanks, electrification, laying internal roads and so on.

While conducting various rehabilitation projects in rural areas we have often found that projects could not be implemented successfully because the de-

sign and planning were done by experts sitting somewhere in Calcutta, Delhi, or Bombay without any knowledge about the actual situation. These professional engineers and architects seldom give due consideration to the actual needs of the beneficiaries, their likes and dislikes, the peculiar local customs prevailing in the place, the indigenous resources available in the locality and also the topographical condition of the area. As a result, sometimes houses are used as cattle-sheds and the pour-flush latrines are converted into kitchens and at other times the entire colony is abandoned by the beneficiaries since it is too far away from their field of work. We found one such beautifully constructed but completely abandoned colony in Maner block in Bihar while engaged in Bihar flood-rehabilitation work in 1975-76.

In order to maximize the involvement of the beneficiaries as well as to overcome the problems delineated above, of late a new type of housing programme called 'Build Your Own House Scheme' has been put into practice in several parts of the country and very good results have been obtained. Under this scheme, as the name suggests, the beneficiaries are required to build their own houses according to a given design prepared for them by a group of expert engineers and architects, in consultation

with our monks, after visiting the affected areas. Building materials are supplied to them in stages from a common supply point. They are supposed to carry the materials to their respective sites and carry out the construction according to specifications. Until one stage is completed the materials for the next stage are not given. Skilled labour and requisite supervision, wherever and whenever necessary, are provided free of cost. On



'Build Your Own House': Happy beneficiaries.
Flood rehabilitation, Bolepur, 1985

completion of the project, a lump sum amount is paid to the beneficiaries in lieu of their labour. Thus the houses get completed very quickly, quite economically and with minimum wastage. Moreover, a sense of belonging and worth develops in the minds of the beneficiaries for their homes, which ensures proper use and continued maintenance.

Normally the beneficiaries are not required to share the cost of the building materials. But if they receive any government subsidy and/or home loan from banks, they are encouraged to contribute the same towards the construction of their houses.

One of the significant features of the Ramakrishna Mission's relief and rehabilitation projects is the minimum overhead cost coupled with maximum utilization of funds. The selfless dedication of the monastic workers and committed admirers and friends combined with their technical skill reduces the set-up cost to a minimum and ensures proper utilization of money entrusted to them by the large-hearted public. It is due to this that as soon as a major calamity occurs, an ever-increasing number of people spontaneously contribute their mite to Ramakrishna Mission Relief with full trust and confidence.

Andhra Pradesh Cyclone Relief and Rehabilitation: An Illustrative Example

There is a common proverb in the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh: 'Remember, remember, the days of November.' Surprisingly, almost every November these areas are rocked by a dreadful cyclone of variable magnitude. At times, usually once in a decade, the cyclone may reach super-cyclonic limits. True to tradition, the Ramakrishna Mission has been conducting massive relief and rehabilitation projects in the wake of these major disasters. For instance, in 1969-70 one such project was organized in Cherala of Nellore district, in 1977-78 in Divi Seema of Krishna and Bapatla of Guntur districts, and in 1990-91 in Yellamanchili of



A cyclone shelter-cum-community hall, Andhra Pradesh

Visakhapatnam and Repalle of Guntur districts.

Since these areas are cyclone-prone, a new experiment was conducted during the cyclone-rehabilitation work in 1977-78. The design of a low-cost cyclone-resistant reinforced-concrete house was adopted at that time. This required precast hollow cement panels to be arranged in between horizontal and vertical iron rods. The roof was also cast in the same fashion. 1,100 such cyclone-resistant houses as well as four double-storey community hall-cum-shelter houses were erected within a span of only fifteen months! But could they stand the test of time—the onslaught of cyclone and tidal wave? More than a decade passed and the same area was again hit by a big cyclone in May 1990. A subsequent visit to the area revealed that the buildings were not only unimpaired but had also saved many lives during the catastrophe.

Soon after this cyclone of May 1990, primary relief was first organized in Visakhapatnam and Guntur. After identification of the beneficiaries 9,168 kg rice, 1,850 kg potatoes, 1,600 kg onions, 800 kg chillies, 800 kg tamarind, 240 kg pickles, 2,520 sets of cooking utensils, 5,941 saris, 5,384 dhotis, 19,589 assorted garments, 300 chadars, 526 bed sheets, 5,666 blankets, etc. were distributed in 34 villages.

Moreover, a detailed survey in Repalle to identify the best programme for economic re-

habilitation of the cyclone ravaged suggested free distribution of livestock, plants, seeds and fertilizers, boats, fishing nets, agricultural pump sets, paddy-threshing machines, tractors, carpentry tool kits, sewing machines, power sprayers, bicycles, etc. These were some of the essential items that would enable them to resume their respective occupations immediately. In such economic-rehabilitation projects care has to be taken to avoid any duplication of relief measures since many voluntary organizations as well as the government are in the field. Furthermore, the beneficiaries must not be given cash to purchase the materials; instead the needed items must be purchased by the voluntary agency for distribution among the identified victims. It is our experience that cash aid received at such times is mostly squandered away leaving the victims where they were.

Finally, 200 pucca houses were constructed with prefabricated stone blocks in Yellamanchili and four double-storey cyclone shelter-cum-community halls were erected in Repalle. Sri G Venkataramana Reddy, the renowned architect and former town planner of Hyderabad, very kindly designed the houses. He personally inspected the affected villages, surveyed the available land, talked to the beneficiaries and only then presented an optimal design that was not only very suitable for the given environment but was also readily acceptable to the beneficiaries. The state government came forward and supplemented the project by giving subsidies.

Concluding Comments

In the preceding pages we have seen that

relief and rehabilitation are the most essential tools for tackling the after-effects of major natural catastrophes, which are regular global phenomena. While we should encourage and promote further research in various branches of science and technology to explore newer and better methods to face and fight natural disasters, attention should also be given to improve the efficiency of organized relief services. Newer scientific and technological advances should be incorporated into relief services so as to make them more effective.

As the dimension of the problem of natural disasters is very large, a joint endeavour by all participating groups is needed. However, a harmonious group of voluntary organizations free

from all prejudices—religious or political—should be formed with a view to deriving the maximum benefit. Government institutions, too, should co-ordinate with the NGOs. There should be a common platform to exchange views and extend the spirit of fellowship.

Time is the most important factor in relief activities. While re-

lief should be brought to the people very promptly, it should not be continued even a day longer than is absolutely necessary. Assistance should be just enough so that the victims may regain self-confidence and return to their normal occupations as early as possible.

Relief services, rendered in the proper spirit and with adequate motivation, not only bring solace and peace to numerous affected people but also enrich one's own life with a sense of deep satisfaction, supreme joy and profound fulfilment. This perhaps is the greatest reward of this noble endeavour. *



Economic rehabilitation: Training in mat-making, Bapatla, 1979

Ramakrishna Mission Relief

Approach, Philosophy and Inspiration

SWAMI GOPALANANDA

The history of the Ramakrishna Order's relief services is as old as that of the Mission itself. Besides their multifarious permanent constructive works, from their very inception, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission have been ever ready to promptly organize ameliorative and healing services whenever the nation has been faced with sudden calamities caused by freaks of nature, follies of men, or scourges of epidemics. Its relief activities have also extended well beyond Indian borders.

The Order's first organized relief work was started by Swami Akhandananda just two weeks after the Mission was founded by Swami Vivekananda on 1 May 1897. Swami Akhandananda drew inspiration for his humanitarian services primarily from Sri Ramakrishna himself. The Master used to say, 'If God can be worshipped in an image, can He not be worshipped in a living person?' Swami Akhandananda literally transformed relief and rehabilitation into acts of worship.

Basic Approach

To date the Ramakrishna Mission and Math have together conducted hundreds of relief works in India, Burma, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, during calamities and hardships issuing from such a variety of causes as famines, floods, fires, epidemics, cyclones, tornados, riots, earthquakes, landslides and droughts. Relief works for evacuees and refugees were carried out on a very large scale during some of the worst national calamities. Apart from these, hundreds of small relief works are conducted throughout the year by various centres wherever local needs arise.

After helping people to survive the devastating calamities caused by nature and human folly, the movement is often faced with the urgency of rehabilitating the suffering people. Within the last decade the Mission has done rehabilitation work worth crores of rupees in various parts of India. In large-scale rehabilitation certain service logistics can be handled only by the government machinery. But the Ramakrishna Mission brings to bear a philosophy of work and methodology of service that has a unique place in the overall national disaster-management framework.

Nearly a hundred and ten years of uninterrupted service have given the Mission the experience and expertise from which scores of other organizations have drawn lessons. It is pleasing to note that there are many other organizations which conduct relief operations in India today. In 1897, when the Ramakrishna Mission started its first relief work, there were hardly any other organized services in the field. It was in fact a pioneering activity of the movement.

There have been many recent developments of far-reaching significance in the field of disaster management. In the first place, primary relief is now considered only a small part of relief—it is neither the first step nor the last. Disaster preparedness is now of primary concern. Considerable resources are presently being devoted to anticipate and warn susceptible populations about impending disasters. Mitigation of the effects of disaster through prior planning, prompt and efficient rescue and relief, and socio-economic and psychological rehabilitation of the victims are all important priorities. Incorporation of efficient developmental models and environmental safeguards in the rehabil-

itation programme are also important issues. The Ramakrishna Mission tries to realistically address many of these issues in its relief and rehabilitation programmes.

Some key elements of the Order's approach to and methodology of relief are:

- Worship of God in humans as the guiding ideal.
- Strictly apolitical conduct of activities and avoidance of populist publicity.
- Financial accountability through detailed records of the sources and utilization of funds.
- Reaching out to the most needy through careful field surveys.
- No discrimination on religious, ethnic, sectional or other grounds.
- Involvement of local people in planning as well as implementation of specific programmes.
- Rapid and efficient provision of services and use of current technology wherever feasible.
- Time-bound programmes and avoidance of 'indiscriminate charity' to prevent wastage of resources and dependence among beneficiaries.
- Participatory approach involving monks, volunteers and technical experts.
- Focus on development—socio-economic, environmental and cultural—empowerment, and preventive strategies in rehabilitation.

The Philosophy of Service

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Man is Narayana Himself. If God can manifest Himself through an image, then why not through man also?' He declared very categorically that God-realization is the aim of human life. But the means to this are legion. 'Does God exist only when the eyes are closed and cease to exist when the eyes are opened?' he observed. He also pointed out that 'an empty stomach is no good for religion', and himself took steps to mitigate such wants. Although he warned against philanthropy being demeaned by desire for name and fame, he commended selfless acts of charity as being 'very noble'. He told Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the famous educationist and hu-

manitarian, 'Though work for the good of others belongs to rajas, yet this rajas has sattva for its basis and is not harmful. Suka and other sages cherished compassion in their minds to give people religious instruction, to teach them about God. You are distributing food and learning. That is good too. If these activities are done in a selfless spirit they lead to God.'

On another occasion, while explaining the essential doctrine of Vaishnava religion, he said, 'Compassion for all beings! ... No, no, it is not compassion to the jiva, but service to the jiva as Shiva.' It was this idea that Swami Vivekananda developed into his philosophy of social service. In a letter to his disciple, Sharat Chandra Chakraborty, on 3 July 1897, Swamiji wrote:

Here is a peculiarity: when you serve a Jiva with the idea that he is Jiva, it is Daya (compassion) and not Prema (love); but when you serve him with the idea that he is the Self, that is Prema. That the Atman is the one object of love is known from Shruti, Smriti, and direct perception. ... Our principle, therefore, should be love, and not compassion. ... For us, it is not to pity but to serve. Ours is not the feeling of compassion but of love, and the feeling of Self in all.

He coined the term *daridra-narayana*, God in the form of the poor, and asked us to serve Him: 'Where should you go to seek God—are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak, Gods? Why not worship them first?' This concept of 'service as worship' defines the outlook of the Ramakrishna Order in all its social-service undertakings.

Swami Vivekananda drew attention to four forms of service: 'The gift of spirituality and spiritual knowledge is the highest, ... the next gift is secular knowledge, ... the next is the saving of life; and the fourth is the gift of food.' He had a comprehensive 'developmental perspective' even for famine relief. When Swami Akhandananda was involved in the Mission's first famine relief, Swamiji wrote, 'Akhandananda is working wonderfully at Mahula, but the system is not good. It seems they are frittering away their energies in one little village and

that only doling out rice. I do not hear that any preaching has been done along with this helping. All the wealth of the world cannot help one little Indian village if the people are not taught to help themselves. Our work should be mainly *educational*, both moral and intellectual.' This holistic-empowerment perspective remains the binding vision of the Order to this day.

The empowerment that Swamiji conceived of was based on practical or applied Vedanta. The Upanishads, Swamiji pointed out, are a mine of strength, for they reveal the Atman, the source of all power. He emphasized that 'these conceptions of the Vedanta must come out, must remain not only in the forest, not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the pulpit and in the cottage of the poor man. ... [For] if the fisherman thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better fisherman; if the student thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better student, and so on.' For the members of the Ramakrishna Order, service is 'Vedanta in practice'. We need to serve others because their suffering is, in fact, our own. Making them happy is the only way we can make ourselves happy. This is the spirit behind Ramakrishna Mission's relief activities.

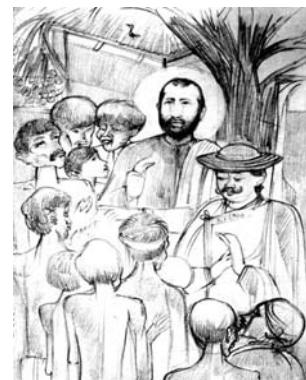
The Inspiration and the Pioneers

Fortunately for us, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and their disciples demonstrated in their own lives practical applications of this wonderful spiritual ideal. These events are the models on which the Mission's relief services have been based. Moreover, they serve as perennial sources of inspiration for all its relief activities. Hence a few illustrations are presented below with brief descriptions culled from their biographies:

Sri Ramakrishna: Mathuramohan and his wife arranged for a pilgrimage to northern India and wanted Sri Ramakrishna to accompany them. At their earnest request the Master consented. The party started on 27 January 1868. They halted for a few days at Deoghar to visit the shrine of Vaidyanath. One day, while pass-

ing through a neighbouring village, Sri Ramakrishna was greatly distressed to see the wretched condition of its people. Moved with sympathy for them, he said to Mathur, 'You are Mother's steward. Feed these poor people and give every one a piece of cloth.' Mathur at first hesitated, saying, 'This pilgrimage will cost a lot of money, and these people are very numerous. We may be short of funds on the journey if we try to feed and clothe them. So what do you say to this, Father?' But Sri Ramakrishna was inexorable. He shed tears at the sight of such abject misery and said in anguish, 'Fie upon you! I am not going to Banaras. I prefer to remain with these helpless people.' Like a petulant child he left Mathur's company and sat with the poor villagers. At the sight of his compassion, Mathur was much moved and ordered bales of cloth from Calcutta to distribute among them, and he fed them as well. Sri Ramakrishna then cheerfully started for Banaras.

Another instance is to the point. Some time in 1870, Mathur, while going out to visit one of his estates for the collection of rent, took Sri Ramakrishna with him. From the worldly point of view, this turned out to be a folly, for which Mathur Babu had to pay heavily. His tenants, at that time, were passing through a crisis. For two consecutive years the harvests had failed, and this had brought the people of the locality to the verge of starvation. Sri Ramakrishna's tender heart was shocked by the sight of the appalling poverty around him, and he immediately asked Mathur to feed the tenants and help them financially instead of demanding his dues from them. He convinced Mathur Babu of the fact that the Divine Mother was really the owner of the pro-



perty, that he was only Her steward, and as such he ought to spend Mother's money for allaying the miseries of Her tenants. Mathur Babu had to act up to this advice.

Sri Sarada Devi: In 1864, when Sarada was about ten years old, Bengal was suffering from a terrible famine, whose effect Jayrambati did not escape. People were starving, and many would come to her father's house for food.



Ramachandra [Sarada's father], a poor man himself, had stocked some rice from the previous year's surplus and he opened a free kitchen for the hungry villagers. Khichri was prepared and kept in several large pots. The members of the family, together with the famine-stricken people, ate this simple meal. Sometimes the hungry people came in such numbers that the khichri would run short and a fresh supply had to be cooked. Sarada had to fan the hot stuff in order to cool it. One day a low-class girl, with shaggy hair and bloodshot eyes, came to the house. Evidently she had been starving for some time. Seeing some powdered rice soaking in a tub for the cattle, she at once started eating it. Sarada asked her to come inside and eat khichri. But the girl was too impatient to wait. Recalling this incident, Sri Sarada Devi said many years after: 'Is it a joke to bear the agony of an empty stomach?'

Swami Akhandananda: The heart-rending incidents that he saw during the course of his itinerant life and the sight of the miserable condition of the people during the dreadful

famine that he witnessed in Murshidabad made Akhandananda feel that it would be cowardice on his part to return to the monastery without serving the people. He wrote to his brother disciples at Alambazar: 'If even one life is saved with what I get here without asking, I shall feel gratified. ... So it is not possible for me to run away from here in a cowardly manner. I may die, but I must do something before that.' Swami Vivekananda was greatly moved by his words and wrote back: 'Bravo, my hero! Victory to the Guru! Go on with the work! Leave the supply of funds to me.' Greatly encouraged, Akhandananda was now determined to achieve his aim or perish in the attempt.

Swamiji immediately sent him one hundred and fifty rupees and two monastic assistants, and Akhandananda started his relief work in a systematic way. The first centre was opened at the village of Mahula on 15 May 1897. Rice was distributed and the rations were measured out by the swami himself, and eighteen persons from a neighbouring village received the rations. Thus the Ramakrishna Mission's relief work was launched. As news of the new relief centre spread, the number of destitute people seeking help began to increase. Akhandananda personally studied the condition of the people in the villages and gave them tokens to procure rice. The mornings were devoted to distributing the rations and the afternoons and evenings to touring the villages.

Within a fortnight, impressed by Akhandananda's work, the secretary of the district famine-relief committee and the district magistrate met him and offered government help. They gladly accepted the swami's suggestion of building a road to connect Mahula with the main road. And when rice was becoming scarce, the district judge and president of the relief committee agreed to supply rice at a cheap rate to the swami.

But soon he ran out of money and had to borrow rice from the relief committee's stock. However, a couple of days later, an insured letter arrived unexpectedly from a friend in Ma-

dras containing five hundred rupees, enabling Akhandananda to promptly pay off the debt. Behind this unexpected help from Madras, at such a critical time, lay Swami Ramakrishna-nanda's thought and efforts. He was regularly publishing Akhandananda's letters to him in the *Brabmavadin* and, as a result, the Ramakrishna Mission's famine fund began to grow.

Within a month, the relief activities included about fifty-seven villages. In some of these places Akhandananda found the people eating indiscriminately to allay their hunger.

Closely on the heels of the famine came a severe earthquake that devastated Berhampur. And then came cholera. With the appearance of cholera, besides providing the able-bodied with work and the disabled with food, nursing the abandoned and the sick was included in the swami's work of service. In the villages in those days the very name of cholera was as terrifying as death. But with the object of rendering service to patients whose families had fled leaving them alone to die, Akhandananda went to the victims' bedside and did whatever he could, regardless of his own personal comfort or safety.

The hot summers, unwholesome food, and impure water were the chief causes for the spread of cholera. So besides serving the patients, the swami took preventive measures. He would burn incense and sulphur in the villages and had holes dug far from each house for the patients' excreta. He instructed the villagers to keep the tank for drinking water uncontaminated and suggested they drink only boiled water with camphor added to it. These measures, and Akhandananda's manner of service, eliminated the disease to a great extent and helped the villagers throw off their foolish dread of it.

As Akhandananda was feeding hundreds of hungry mouths at the relief centre, and fighting day after day a ceaseless battle with poverty and pestilence, he was inspired by a letter that Swami Vivekananda wrote to him on 15 June 1897. A feeling of great strength moved his heart. Dedicating himself wholly to the welfare of humankind, and remaining absorbed day and night in ceaseless activity, he began to catch a glimpse of the dawning of a wonderful new approach.

After three months of relief work at Malda, the need for more funds was growing. Though directed by Swami Brahmananda to send weekly reports to the press and appeal directly to the people, Akhandananda preferred

to depend solely on Sri Ramakrishna's grace. However, his letters to the monastery were published in the *Basumat* of Calcutta and translations of them appeared in the *Brabmavadin* of Madras. The former also published his thought-provoking article, 'Famine and Its Remedy'.

When, on the basis of incorrect reports from the officials, the government decided to end all relief operations by August, Akhandananda at once set out for Berhampur to report to the secretary of the relief committee the extreme distress of the people of Navagram. The local officer was to have made an enquiry, but instead had sent a report of the two previous months, which did not reveal the true picture of the people's desperate condition. Akhandananda sent his own report to the magistrate, who was very appreciative of his adroit action and zeal. The board unanimously resolved to hand over immediately two hundred and fifty rupees for the continuation of the relief work.

Thus a new centre was started at Panch-



gaon. Distribution of rice was suspended at Mahula, but each person at the centre would receive a dhoti. A few hundred dhotis were sent from Alambazar Math, and on the day of the distribution, hundreds of men and women were given a cloth each, after a hearty meal. Mr Levinge, the district magistrate, who presided over the function, said in his address: 'It is to Swami Akhandananda that I am indebted for the relief of the famine-stricken in the Murshidabad district. He has rendered me much help, and so ably has he managed it, I have had no trouble in the proper utilization of government relief funds.'

Now that relief was being given at two centres, the scarcity of funds began to be felt even more acutely. At this time, a letter arrived from Ramakrishnananda in Madras, saying that a gentleman had remitted one thousand rupees for relief work. The following day, word came that the same gentleman was sending a further five hundred rupees as a second instalment. Such encouraging news gave the swami fresh energy and he began to work with redoubled vigour.

Following these events, the relief work never again suffered for lack of funds. Centres were opened at different places in the district, and hundreds of destitute people received help until the end of the year.

Swami Trigunatitananda: He lived the teachings of his Master and his great brother disciple Swami Vivekananda, serving the poor and preaching wherever he went. Trigunatitananda was among the few disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who took Swamiji's words about doing good to the world to heart. 'He alone is a child of Sri Ramakrishna who is moved to pity for all creatures and exerts himself for them even at the risk of incurring personal damnation.' Trigunatitananda was inflamed by these words, and exerted himself to the utmost to carry them out.

In August 1897, he was placed by the Ramakrishna Mission in charge of the famine-relief work at Dinajpur, where he made the village of Birole his centre of work. On 27 August



he wrote to Swami Akhandananda, 'I am now serving forty-two villages. ... I think in a very short time the number of my people will be three hundred.' Within two months he had extended help to some eighty-four villages. As a result of his untiring and disinterested services the government allowed him

to buy rice at a much reduced price. Trigunatitananda went about this relief work systematically and thoroughly. He first determined the real need of the families in all these eighty-four villages, going to each dwelling to see for himself, keeping records, and distributing rice according to need. At night he slept atop the bushels of rice at Birole to guard them from theft. He had no help and asked for none. The British rulers of the district were much impressed, having never before seen the like of it.

At the end of Trigunatitananda's work in Dinajpur, on 3 December 1897 a public meeting was held to present an address of thanks to him. In his presidential speech, Mr N Bonham-Carter said, 'I fully realize the swami's good and disinterested work. He had nothing to bind him to this district. His only object was to do good to mankind. ... He did not depend on the officials for help ... [and] did work in the best possible way ... with his own hands. ... It is a beginning of self-help in the right line. If there is a germ it may grow up in time.' Then Trigunatitananda spoke in reply for two hours, dealing with the cause, history and remedy of famine. This talk, which shows the great thought he gave to the subject and his practical bent of mind, was printed in four instalments in the *Indian Mirror*. Later the swami printed his talk in a pamphlet of twenty-six pages, which could well have served as a manual on famine

relief. The magistrate also gave a report:

I cannot close my report without referring to the good work done by Swami Trigunatitananda, a member of the Ramakrishna Mission. ... Here the swami took up his abode in great discomfort, and distributed rice gratis to deserving cases. He made every endeavour to arrive at the truth ... [making] personal enquiries into the cases. ... Relief was given irrespective of caste and creed. ... I would add that the swami managed the whole work himself without the assistance of myself or anyone else.

Swami Vivekananda highly praised Trigunatitananda for his ardour, holding him up as an example. He said, 'He and Gangadhar are the only ones willing to help me in Ramakrishna's work!'

Swami Sadananda: Swamiji's immense faith in the capabilities and devotion to service of his first monastic disciple, Swami Sadananda, is evident from the fact that Sadananda was chosen by him to be the supervisor of the plague-relief work which was started in March 1899 in Calcutta. A committee was formed by the Ramakrishna Mission with Sister Nivedita as its secretary and Swami Sadananda as its supervisor.

When relief work started on 31 March, the people of Calcutta received a share of Swamiji's boundless love for humanity through Sadananda. The rich had left the city in great panic, the helpless masses cursed their fate, and

the unfortunate victims of the disease awaited death—this was the state of Calcutta then. In this city of despair Swamiji's disciple Sadananda presented a picture of hope and fearlessness. His

very presence had a calming effect on the panic-stricken people.



The disease first made its appearance in Calcutta in May 1898. Swamiji wanted to start relief operations immediately to help the afflicted. The first thing Swamiji did was draft a plague manifesto in Bengali and Hindi. Due to the hard work of Sadananda and Nivedita, the manifesto reached the greater part of the population and considerably reassured them.

There were hardly any sweepers to clean the garbage that had piled up in the slums of Calcutta, most of them having left the city out of fear. The eradication of insanitation appeared to be the immediate work. So Sadananda himself, with a broomstick in hand, used to go about cleaning the slums and lanes of the city. Day after day he cleaned the foul-smelling places from which even the scavengers shied away. Seeing his example, many young men came forward as volunteers to help in the work. He had a genius for organizing work. The group of boys loved him and were ever ready to work at his bidding. He would rush to the bedside of any plague victim he heard of, and forgetting food and sleep, would engage himself in his service. The educated citizens of Calcutta were speechless on seeing his dedicated service.

When plague broke out in Bhagalpur in 1904, Sadananda was the guiding hand there also behind the relief operations conducted by the Ramakrishna Mission. During relief operations, his zeal for service was a source of inspiration for others.

Sister Nivedita: In the month of March 1899 plague was rife in Nivedita's neighbourhood in Baghbazar. On 5 April, Nivedita made an appeal through the newspapers for financial aid. The response was good. On 21 April, she spoke to the students at the Classic Theatre on 'The Plague and the Duty of Students'. Swami Sadananda also addressed the students at this meeting. As a result, enthusiasm for the work was created and about fifteen students offered themselves as volunteers. A meeting was held every Sunday at Balaram Bose's house. Weekly reports of the work done were recorded and further plans were discussed. The whole work was

carried on in such an organized way that the district medical officer and chairman were greatly pleased.

The renowned physician Dr Radha Gobinda Kar wrote: 'During this calamity the compassionate figure of Sister Nivedita was seen in every slum of the Baghbazar locality. She helped others with money without giving a thought to her own condition. At one time when her own diet consisted only of milk and fruits, she gave up milk to meet the medical expenses of a patient.' She concentrated on removing the conditions that led to the spread of plague, namely insanitation and ignorance. Swami Sadananda supervised the work of the sweeper-boys and took upon himself the responsibility of keeping the slums clean. Nivedita inspected all the work done and gave instructions. One day, she started cleaning the lanes herself when there was a shortage of volunteers. The boys of the neighbourhood felt ashamed and ran to help her, promising to keep the lanes clean thenceforth. Hand-bills giving instructions about the do's and don'ts during the plague were distributed in all the localities. Ignoring the dangers of working amongst the plague-stricken, Nivedita nursed the patients day and night. Dr Kar, an eyewitness to Sister Nivedita's work, wrote:

In the year 1899, plague took the form of an epidemic. In the previous year at the indication of an outbreak of plague the panicky people, apprehending terrible consequences, had fled from the city. ... This year the Governor, Sir John Woodburn, gave assurance that no patient would be forcibly removed from his home. ... During that time, one day, when I returned home at noon-time in the month of Chaitra af-

ter seeing the patients, I saw a European lady sitting on a dusty chair near the door. She was Sister Nivedita. She had been waiting for me a long time in order to get some information. That morning I had been to see a plague-stricken patient in the slum in Baghbazar. Sister Nivedita had come to enquire about the arrangements made for the patient and to take upon herself the task of nursing him. I told her that the patient's condition was critical. Having discussed with her the possibilities of hygienic nursing in the slums of the poor people, I asked her to take precautions. When I went to visit the patient again in the afternoon I saw Sister Nivedita sitting with the child in her lap in the damp and weather-beaten hut in that unhealthy locality. Day in and day out, night after night, she remained engaged in nursing that child in that hut, having abandoned her own house. When the hut was to be disinfected she took a small ladder and began white-washing the walls herself. Her nursing never slackened even when death was a certainty. After two days, the child lay in Eternal Sleep in the affectionate lap of the merciful lady.

In an article entitled 'The Plague' included in her book *Studies from an Eastern Home*, Nivedita has given a vivid description of the plague and the death of this child. She is silent only about the services rendered by herself.

The plague work continued alongside her school work, and sometimes the strain of the work was too much for her to bear in the depressingly hot climate. 'It is so hot and we have been rushing about so over plague that I feel tired out body, soul and spirit, and scarcely know how to write, but I could not lie down for very shame, for the children have begun to troop into school.' Her admirable work will be greatly cherished for ever. *



Ramakrishna Mission's Disaster Response*

An Overview

Introduction

Asia is the continent most vulnerable to natural disasters. Within Asia, India has been constantly subject to various types of disasters—both natural and man-made—ranging from earthquakes, cyclones and tidal waves to epidemics, famines, communal violence and industrial accidents. Between 1897 and 1991 India was pulverized by an average of 3 earthquakes every year having an intensity of 6 or more on the Richter scale. Between 1953 and 1978 floods inundated an average of 76 lakh hectares annually and caused damage to crops, houses and utilities amounting to Rs 298 crore annually. The 2,275-km stretch between Kolkata and Ramanathapuram on the East Cost of India is prone to severe cyclones that have caused 148 landfalls between 1869 and 1984. Between 1770 and 1943, when the British were ruling India, there were 23 famines across the country. Bengal suffered in 7 of these, in addition to being plagued by cholera and other epidemics, losing thousands of lives each year.

These disasters devastate the lives of people. The effect on the victims is unimaginable. Apart from death and injury, people suffer psychologically and economically. Victims are initially disoriented and displaced. After the initial shock, as the consequences of the tragedy slowly sink in, they face the daunting prospect of rebuilding their lives.

The Ramakrishna Mission is ever alert to problems arising from disasters. It has provided over 34 different types of relief for over a century. It caters to both the immediate and

long-term needs of victims, regardless of caste, gender, ethnicity or religion. Soon after headquarters gets information about a disaster, it makes a preliminary assessment and then coordinates relief operations in collaboration with the branch centres nearest to the site of the disaster. The immediate needs of the people are met through primary relief. This takes the form of food, clothing, temporary shelters, medical assistance and other necessities. Later, after a survey, the longer-term needs of people are catered for through rehabilitation. This includes the construction of houses, schools, colonies and disaster shelters as well as other initiatives to restore community infrastructure. The financing of relief operations are initially done through a provident fund, and continued through contributions from the public and funding agencies. The relief operations are undertaken by monks and local volunteers. This allows for a unique blending of experience with local knowledge. The distinguishing feature of the Ramakrishna Mission, however, is the philosophy underlying its approach. This has been dealt with elsewhere (see pages 293-300).

Pioneering Projects

Even before the Ramakrishna Mission was founded on 1 May 1897, relief was undertaken on personal initiative by the monks of the Order. When news of an ongoing famine in India reached Swami Vivekananda at London in 1896, he immediately sent some money from his own funds to the *Indian Mirror* for relief. Miss Emmeline Souter also provided him some funds for the same purpose. The first planned

* This article is based on Br Paramarthachaitanya, 'Ramakrishna Mission Relief Services: Its Ideal, Application and Spirit', unpublished dissertation, Probationers' Training Centre, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, 2005.

project of the Mission was instituted at Mahula in Murshidabad district of Bengal on 15 May 1897, to relieve people ravaged by an ongoing famine. This project was the first organized relief operation by a voluntary organization in India. It was inspired by Swami Vivekananda and implemented by Swami Akhandananda.

The plague epidemic that seized Calcutta in April 1898 created mass hysteria. Swami Vivekananda, who was recuperating his health in Darjeeling rushed to Calcutta and drafted a plague manifesto to reassure the panic-stricken people. Relief involved nursing the afflicted in segregation camps and improving public sanitation. When Calcutta was again in the grip of a plague epidemic the following year, a relief programme was instituted on 31 March 1899. Sister Nivedita and Swami Sadananda spearheaded the relief operation.

Figure 1 below shows the number of primary-relief operations undertaken by the Ramakrishna Mission in the first hundred years of its existence. Since the 1960s there has been a steady increase in the number of primary-relief operations.

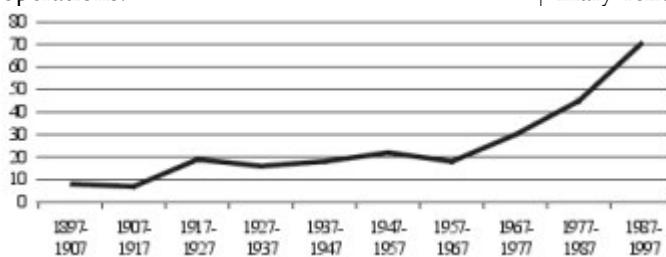


Figure 1: Primary relief operations undertaken by the Ramakrishna Mission during 1897-1997

Flood relief is by far the commonest relief activity of the Ramakrishna Mission. Fires, cyclones and droughts are other common calamities that have regularly engaged its attention.

Landmark Relief Operations of the Ramakrishna Mission: 1897-2005

The following is a summary of the major relief operations undertaken by the Ramakrishna Order. It provides a bird's-eye view of the evolution of its services as well as the range of its

relief operations.

Earthquake Relief; Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh; May-June 1905: 4 April 1905—Violent earthquake, Richter magnitude 8.7, shatters Kangra and Dharamsala. More than 20,000 lives lost. 90% of Dharamsala's population perish. Perhaps the worst natural disaster to strike this region. 2 May—The Ramakrishna Mission begins relief at Kanayra village, four miles from Dharamsala. Distribution of flour, dal, salt, pyjamas, chadars, coats and dhotis, and other items of daily need. Even in 1905 the Ramakrishna Mission adopts a two-pronged approach. Apart from distributing food and clothing, buildings are repaired and huts built. Total expenditure Rs 592. About 30% of this used for rehabilitation. Another 471 rupees donated.

Earthquake Relief; North Bihar; January-September 1934: 15 January 1934—Earthquake of 8.4 Richter magnitude rocks north Bihar. Death toll 10,000. Another 10,000 rendered homeless. The Ramakrishna Mission provides relief in 7 districts through 14 of its centres. Primary-relief provisions include food, blankets, utensils, buckets, and clothing. Rehabilitation involves the construction of 1,993 temporary and 1,428 semi-permanent huts. Houses are also repaired and building material, like corrugated iron sheets, supplied. A total of Rs 1.17 lakh raised, entirely from public donations. Total expenditure Rs 1.14 lakh. The surplus is directed to a provident relief fund.

Evacuee Relief; Burma; 1942-44: 1942—World War II. Burma is on the verge of being attacked by Japanese forces. Evacuees seek asylum in India. Large masses cross rugged terrain to reach India, while the enemy hovers above. Many perish like flies due to starvation, epidemic cholera and exhaustion. Despite the risk of becoming casualties of war, the Ramakrishna Mission enters war zone. 3,397 evacuees are assisted under trying circumstances at a total ex-

pense of Rs 74,665.

Distress (Famine) Relief; Bengal; June 1943-April 1945: World War II—The British anticipate Japanese attack on Bengal and plan retreat. Initiate 'scorched-earth policy' before retreating, to deprive the enemy of food, infrastructure and communications. Profiteers implement the policy. Supply of food cut to the bone. Prices spiral up. Starvation, death and destitution stalk Bengal. Death toll over 30 lakh, at a modest estimate. Yet the British government refuses to declare a famine, lest it be legally responsible for feeding the impoverished. The disaster is reclassified as 'distress'. June 1943—The Ramakrishna Mission begins 'distress relief'. At its peak, the Mission operates 75 relief centres across 19 districts, covering 1,169 villages and 22 towns. Rice, paddy, dal, milk, blankets, and clothing, among other necessities, distributed. 9 free canteens, 32 milk canteens, medical relief, and pecuniary help complement primary relief. Economic rehabilitation undertaken by organizing spinning, and leather and iron works. Total cash expenditure Rs 11.7 lakh approximately. Goods worth Rs 25 lakh also distributed. Many children orphaned in this famine. Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara, founded in September 1944 to care for these children.

Riot Relief; East Bengal; October 1946-December 1948: 15 August 1947—India attains independence. Partition of the subcontinent and communal violence mar jubilation. Minorities subjected to atrocities, despite assurances of protection from the state. East Pakistan: Noakhali and Tippera ravaged by slaughter, rape, abduction, arson, and forced conversion, among other brutalities. 22 October 1946—Tippera: the Ramakrishna Mission begins riot relief, in spite of being preoccupied with flood relief. Besides primary relief in the form of food, blankets, and clothing, assistance provided with agriculture and in restarting schools. 2 students' homes for orphans built at Chandpur and Ramganj. 31 December 1948—Relief ceases, but rehabilitation continues, particu-

larly the care of orphans. Total receipts Rs 3.4 lakh. Total expenditure Rs 2.9 lakh. The balance is used for rehabilitation.

Refugee Relief; East Punjab; October 1947-mid 1948: August 1947—Partition of Punjab leads to mass exodus. Government starts 56 refugee camps with the largest at Kurukshetra sheltering 3,00,000 people. Conditions extremely unhygienic. October 1947—The Ramakrishna Mission starts primary-relief work at Kurukshetra. Clothes, blankets and milk provided. March 1948—An average of 23,638 people supplied milk daily, and 275 sick refugees on average given medical assistance. The Mission received Rs 62,378 as aid to undertake this project, about half the amount coming from the central government.

Refugee Relief; East Bengal; May 1948-March 1949, March 1950-August 1951, April 1971-January 1972: 1946—Communal violence divides East Bengal. 1946-1971—People flee in fits and starts, in contrast to the one-off exodus in Punjab. The Ramakrishna Mission mobilizes major refugee relief on three occasions.

1947—4,63,474 East Pakistan inhabitants flee to India. 1948—Another 4,90,555 do likewise. First relief operation from 17 May 1948 to 16 March 1949 involves the distribution of 31,000 items of clothing and blankets, 183 tons of food and about Rs 8.6 lakh of government funds.

1950—1,172,928 people from East Pakistan seek asylum. 6 July 1950—Calcutta: the Mission feeds about 12,000 refugees daily at Sealdah railway station. As the exodus gains momentum the Mission operates 19 centres across West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Tripura and East Pakistan. Refugees supplied food, medical care, and milk for children. 1950-51—2,907 families rehabilitated. Relief undertaken with government cooperation. Work discontinued prematurely in 1951 due political and other problems. The Mission continues rehabilitation work in Assam, Tripura and West Bengal.

13 April 1971 to 31 January 1972—29 re-

lief camps are conducted in the bordering villages of Assam, Tripura and West Bengal. Total cost Rs 27.3 lakh in cash. Another Rs 1 crore worth of goods distributed. 2,00,000 evacuees benefit. December 1971—Bangladesh gains independence. Relief and rehabilitation shifted across the border.

Cyclone Relief; Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu; November 1977-June 1981: 20 November 1977—Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu wrecked by cyclone accompanied by 20-ft-high tidal waves. Death toll between 15,000 and 20,000. Unprecedented in a century, unimaginable devastation. Approximately 71 lakh people in 2,302 villages affected through loss of life or damage to property and crops. The Ramakrishna Mission begins prompt primary relief distributing food grains, utensils, clothes and other essentials. Rehabilitation in Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu: housing colony with 57 pucca houses and 2 community halls constructed. Andhra Pradesh: 1,101 hurricane-resistant houses, 8 community halls and temples constructed in 10 villages. Total cost exceeds Rs 68.5 lakh.

Flood Relief; Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Gujarat, West Bengal; August 1978-June 1982: Monsoon 1978—Torrential rains lead to flooding of Ganga and Yamuna rivers. Vast sections of the Gangetic plains of north India submerged in worst flood of the century. Uttar Pradesh, Northern Bihar, Assam and West Bengal most affected. 1,291 people die, 4.3 crore displaced, 15 lakh dwellings destroyed. In West Bengal: 11 of 16 districts inundated by the floods. Many villages swept way. Damage to property estimated at Rs 750 crore. The Ramakrishna Mission opens relief camps in 8 of the 11 affected districts. Clothes, blankets, utensils and lanterns distributed among other articles as part of primary aid at a net cost of Rs 6.89 lakh. Rehabilitation: 260 semi-pucca houses in four colonies and a community shelter constructed and 5 tube wells sunk at a cost of Rs 15.37 lakh. In addition, a girls' high school built at a cost of Rs 5.6

lakh. The ongoing Pallimangal project of rural development in the Hooghly district of West Bengal is an offshoot of this rehabilitation work. Total cost for the whole operation Rs 27.8 lakh.

Earthquake Relief; Maharashtra; October 1993-April 1999: 30 September 1993—Maharashtra rocked by a moderate-intensity quake with epicentre at Latur. 40 villages affected. About 12,000 people perish and 1.4 lakh rendered homeless even though the quake magnitude is only 6.4 Richter. Property damage estimated at Rs 900 crore. 1 October—The Ramakrishna Mission mobilizes primary relief in the form of cooked food, rice, dal, clothes, blankets and other necessities benefiting about 3,000 families. Expenditure on primary relief Rs 2.44 lakh. Rehabilitation focused on 3 villages of Latur. 646 houses, 3 school-cum-shelters, 3 community-cum-prayer halls and 6 children's parks constructed. Assistance is also given with water and electricity supply. Expenditure on rehabilitation Rs 4.9 crore. Unique feature is a follow-up programme for the long-term economic, social, environmental, health, and cultural development of the beneficiaries undertaken through formal and non-formal education and counselling.

Cyclone Relief; Orissa; November 1999-December 2001: 29 October 1999—Orissa struck by super cyclone. Winds at 260 kmph and 25-ft-high tidal waves devastate the coastal areas. This is the strongest cyclone recorded in India in terms of intensity and damage, measuring 5 on a cyclone scale of 1 to 5. Death toll over 10,000. 30% of Orissa's population rendered homeless overnight. 1 November 1999—The Ramakrishna Mission begins primary relief at Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Bhadrak, Cuttack, Jaipur, Khurda, and Puri, the worst-affected districts. Food, clothes, blankets, cooking utensils, plastic sheets and other essential items distributed. More than 10,000 families benefit. Total expenditure on primary relief Rs 1.5 crore. Rehabilitation undertaken at Kotang in Puri and Kanaguli in Jagatsinghpur. 330 cy-

clone-resistant houses and 6 school-cum-cyclone-shelters constructed, 31 tube wells sunk. Rehabilitation costs amount to Rs 4 crore approximately. Net expenditure Rs 5.5 crore.

Earthquake Relief; Gujarat; January 2001-January 2003: 26 January 2001—Gujarat rocked by a quake of Richter magnitude 6.9 with epicentre 20 km north-west of Bhuj in Kutch district. An estimated 20,000 people perish. Buildings tumble like houses of cards in 21 of 25 districts across the state. Estimated private property damage worth Rs 6,000 crore. Public property damage estimated at Rs 1,000 crore. The Ramakrishna Mission starts primary relief on the very day of the disaster through its centres in Rajkot, Porbandar and Limbdi. Cooked food, food packets, food grains, drinking water, tarpaulin sheets, tents, clothes, blankets and other necessities distributed to tens of thousands of victims in nearly 281 villages in 5 of the 21 affected districts. Total expenditure on primary relief Rs 3 crore. Kutch, Porbandar, Rajkot and Surendranagar districts earmarked for rehabilitation work. 353 houses, 76 school buildings, 2 community centres and 2 prayer halls constructed. In addition, 159 families provided building material for constructing their own houses. Rehabilitation costs amount to over Rs 16 crore. Overall expenditure Rs 20 crore approximately.

Tsunami Relief; Andamans, South India, Sri Lanka; December 2004- : 26 December 2004—A massive tsunami launched in the wake of an earthquake in Indonesia crashed into the South and South-East Asian coastline. Nearly 1,75,000 are reported dead (over 10,700 in India and 31,200 in Sri Lanka) and more than 1,07,700 reported missing (over 5,600 each in India and Sri Lanka). Massive relief operations are launched by the Order in the Andaman Islands, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Sri Lanka within hours of the disaster. Several thousands of victims are served with cooked meals, food materials, medical aid, temporary shelters and essential commodities like clothing, utensils and sleeping mats. Centres in

Chennai, Kalady and Batticaloa distribute fibreglass boats and catamarans (a total of 487 boats distributed) as well as fishing nets and other fishing gear. 324 houses, 3 community halls and 1 school-cum-shelter house also taken up for construction. A few tsunami-affected children admitted to the hostel at the Port Blair centre. A sum of Rs 5.22 crore had been spent on these relief operations as of 31 March 2005.

Relief Operations Abroad

Major Relief operations have also been undertaken by the Order in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Russia.

Sri Lanka	1958, 1986-88, 2004-	Riot relief (Colombo), Flood relief (Batticaloa), Refugee relief (Colombo), Tsunami relief (Batticaloa)
Bangladesh	Since 1971	Regular disturbance, scarcity, flood and cyclone reliefs
Nepal	1980-81	Earthquake relief (Baitadi)

Table 1: Foreign Relief Operations

Innovative Rehabilitation

The Ramakrishna Mission has attempted to provide innovative solutions to local problems in its rehabilitation programmes. Some of the innovative rehabilitation programmes attempted by the Mission include:

- Self-governing colonies like Sarada Palli in Bhadreshwar, Hooghly, Ananda Nagar in Agartala, Tripura, and Ramakrishna Colony at Shonevil, Assam, in response to the East Bengal refugee relief. A similar scheme was experimented with in Vedaranya, Tamil Nadu.

- A development programme was initiated in two villages of Latur as part of the rehabilitation following the 1993 earthquake. Named the Vivekananda Gram Vikas Prakalpa, this project included an agricultural-extension

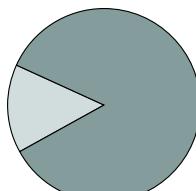
programme comprising crop development, orchard plantation, bio-intensive gardening, compost-making and afforestation; water-resource management through nala-bunding, spillway-dam construction and related irrigational activities; primary health care including provision of sanitary latrines; entrepreneurship development in poultry, tailoring, etc.; women's cooperatives and provision of modern choolas. The entire development project involved an expenditure of Rs 60 lakh.

- A 120-m-long bridge was constructed across the Vruddha Gautami river in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh as part of post-cyclone rehabilitation conducted between 1997-2000. This was at the earnest request of the local island community that had remained badly cut off from the mainland.

- In 2001, the government and the people of Japan donated 17 speedboats to the Ramakrishna Mission for rapid deployment of relief in times of flood. 4 of these are maintained directly by the Mission and 13 by the civil-defence department, West Bengal. This is one example of the Mission's efforts at keeping itself abreast of the latest technology.

A Comparative Look at the Dharamsala and Gujarat Reliefs

In the 21st century the Ramakrishna Mission is better equipped to provide relief and rehabilitation more efficiently and on a larger scale, thanks to the improvements in transport, communications and technology, the support of funding agencies and the growth in the number of branch centres, monastic members and devoted workers. For example, when earthquake relief was undertaken at Dharamsala in 1905, it took nearly a month after the disaster for relief to begin. Almost a century later, in 2001, earthquake relief in



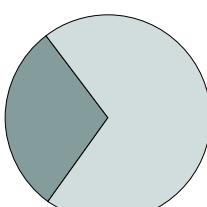
Expenditure at Gujarat, 2001-03

Expenditure at Gujarat, 2001-03

Gujarat began on the very day of the disaster. The duration of relief at Dharamsala was about a month, whereas in Gujarat it lasted more than two years. Similarly, at Dharamsala, the main thrust of the work was primary relief with rehabilitation only constituting about 30% of the total expenditure. In contrast, rehabilitation expenses constituted about 85% of the total expenditure in Gujarat.

Conclusion

The Ramakrishna Mission may now be more efficient and better equipped to cater to the long-term needs of victims of disturbances and disasters. But the thread that connects it to its past is the spirit in which relief work is undertaken. In the first half of the last century, monks and volunteers who provided relief had to overcome innumerable difficulties to gain access to the disaster-affected areas, and financial support was often tenuous. However, the inevitable hardship that providing relief entails has always been viewed by the members of the Order as part of their spiritual practice and this has enabled them overcome many difficulties. Even as the volume of relief has increased over the years and the Order has tried to incorporate the latest technological innovations and organizational skills in its relief and rehabilitation projects, it is its adherence to sound basic principles, combining high idealism with a keen practical sense, that has been the key to the success of the Mission's efforts. The high ideal is enshrined in the Order's motto: '*Atmano moksharham jagaddhitaya cha*; For one's own liberation and for the welfare of the world', and this ideal is made practical through service in the spirit of worship. This ensures efficient delivery of services accompanied by a personal touch that allows all persons involved a feel of the Divine. *



Expenditure at Dharamsala, 1905

The Human Touch

'Whose Duty Is It?'



Swami Kalyanananda

joined by Swamis Nirmalananda and Atmananda.

One day one of them was going from door to door collecting money for the work. When he approached a certain hidebound brahmin, the latter said in an accusing tone, 'Sir, you have become a monk after renouncing all works. If you perform work now, you are sure to go to hell!' The swami smiled and said, 'The words of the shastra are infallible. If I am destined to go to hell, I will.'

The sadhu's nonchalant attitude astonished the brahmin. He was curious to know his real attitude. The monk explained: 'Sir, whose duty is it to remove the sufferings of the famine-stricken people? The householders', of course. They are now engrossed in their own comfort and luxury, oblivious of their duties. So who will remove the afflictions of the poor? That is why we monks have plunged ourselves into action. If you come forward and take up this work, we shall leave. If we are to go to hell for the sake of the welfare of the world, what does it matter? Isn't it all nothing but the same Brahman?'

'It Is Winter'

Many devotees would visit Belur Math to offer pranams to Swami Shivananda, the second president of the Ramakrishna Order, on

In 1899, Kishengarh in erstwhile Rajputana was in the grip of a famine. Swamis Kalyanananda and Swarupananda, dropped their idea of pilgrimage and took in hand the service of the helpless. They were later

his birthday. On one such day Swami Shivananda said 'Look here, give some blankets to the poor. It is winter; they suffer much due to cold.' His wish was immediately fulfilled, and a devotee also arranged for some funds so that this service could continue. This 'winter relief' is now a regular activity of many centres of the Order.



Swami Shivananda

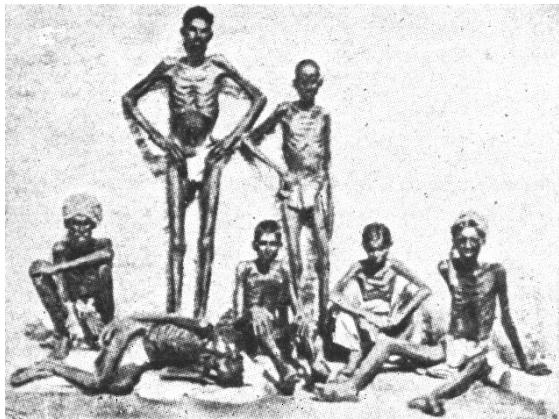
'This Is the Offering Mother Will Accept'

On 21 September 1943 Swami Virajanananda, the then president of the Order, wrote to the monastic manager of Belur Math from Shyamalatal in Uttarakhand: 'I get news of the terrible misery in Bengal in the newspapers and in virtually every letter written from there. Such suffering is unimaginable. It makes me terribly depressed even to think of it. It is impossible for a few organizations to remove all this misery. Anyway, we shall keep trying our level best and serve with all our hearts; the rest is in the hands of God.'

'I am glad to learn that Durga Puja will be celebrated [at the Math] this year too. ... I think this time only the most essential elements of the Puja need be performed, and the expenditure on Puja be kept to a minimum (Rs 200/300 approx.). It would be better if the rest of the money is spent in feeding the poor and the indigent, the hungry and the orphan who come to the Math,



Swami Virajanananda



The evil face of famine, 1899

whatever be their number. No one should return dejected. Arrange only to make khichri. Add vegetables and everything else to that. You need not cook anything separately or arrange for sweets. Offer this khichri in big vessels to Mother and with that *virat* offering serve the Narayanas who have nothing. This time this is the offering that Mother will accept and make our worship successful. No special (arrangements for anybody). Thakur had also said, I shall have vessels full of rice and dal. This is the time for that. If we can feed the hungry and the afflicted even for three days, give them food and clothing, I believe there can be nothing more pleasing to Thakur, Ma and Swamiji.'

'I Felt as if I Would Go Mad'

1945 saw a huge influx of refugees into Nagaland from war-ravaged Burma. The Lieutenant-Governor, Robert Reid, requested Swami Bhuteshananda, then in charge of Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong, to conduct relief services for the refugees at Dimapur. Many years later the swami recounted his experiences: 'I was then at Shillong. Robert Reid's wife phoned me up and said, "Maharaj, could you please come over?" I went. Reid said, "Maharaj, this is a very sensitive place; so I cannot request any outsider. If you do [conduct relief], then we are ready [to help]."' I said, "We shall." I then requested Belur Math to send workers. Swami

Madhavanandaji sent the very persons I requested for. A school building was given to us for our camp.

'This was a peculiar relief! The refugees were coming—they were to be fed, rested, and then provided with rail tickets for their onward journey. We provided clothes, milk, tinned condensed milk, as well as some other necessities. Each of the serving monks was provided with a kitbag containing flattened rice, a tin of condensed milk, a candle and matchbox, and a stick. These would be of help in case they were left stranded during a bombing. They were also instructed not to walk on the main road but travel through the adjacent jungle to avoid being bombed.'

'There was rain. The entire camp and the adjacent land was covered knee-deep with mud. There was excreta all over the place and the stench was unbearable. Those who passed that way remarked, "How do you all stay here?" I replied, "Come and see, you too will be able to stay." We had grown accustomed to the situation. We would sprinkle the ground with some antiseptic Phenyle before we sat down to eat. The drinking water came from the nearby pond.'

'Then there was cholera. Cholera patients started coming to the camp. One day I found a cholera patient lying by the roadside, on the verge of death. He had a spotless white mosquito curtain for cover. He was evidently a rich



A more recent refugee-relief camp, Mandapam, 1983-88, for Sri Lankan children

man—must have been an officer. We brought him into the camp. He kept asking for water. I requested another camp inmate to give him water. "I won't even go near him", he replied. "Well," said I, "then you will have to leave the camp." The man had to comply. We soon moved the patient to our main camp. He survived.

"There were government doctors. They used to examine the patients. We provided medicines. There were food canteens. They provided only rice and dal; there were no vegetables. We issued tickets for the meals and endorsed them for payment. After the refugees had had their meals we would provide them tickets to travel by special trains. There was terrible suffering.

"We had hurricane-lanterns. But the lighting was insufficient. Many people would slip and fall in the mud. Some even died. So we procured some powerful Petromax lanterns. Complete blackout was being enforced at the time. The military commandant said, "Swamiji, are you planning to welcome the Japanese with all this lighting?" I said, "What shall we do? The patients are dying." The commandant did not say anything more.

"The dead were given mass burials. Nothing else was feasible. Government sweepers would carry out these burials. One day a Bengali woman came and started weeping at my feet. Her husband had died and she wanted his body cremated. "All right, we shall", I said. I had acquaintance with the chief medical officer, a Briton, in Shillong. I said to him, "See, we will have this man cremated. You have to permit us." He replied, "I will, but you must ensure a complete cremation. The body must not remain half burnt." I said, "I shall make sure", and arranged the cremation with the help of the sweepers. Getting wood from the jungle was not very difficult. The man had come to the camp with his wife but had contracted malaria and died. The day after the cremation his parents arrived. It was a heart-rending sight. I thought, God! How shall I face them? But,

what a surprise, they appeared before me as if nothing had happened! They had suffered so much that their hearts had been turned into stone. They could not even weep! After having witnessed all this misery, for many days I felt as if I would go mad. And the horrible stench! It stuck to my body, as it were. Such suffering I have never faced at any other time in my life.

"The president of our sevashrama at Rangoon was a very wealthy person. He left Rangoon with a truckload of goods. Unfortunately, a bridge was found broken on the way. The truck had to be left behind, along with its load. He began to walk with his wife and small child. They were not used to this. They suffered from cholera on the way. By the time they reached our camp they were reduced to being beggars. We provided the child with some of our clothing. People kept asking us, "Maharaj, so many are dying. Is there no remedy?" We had no answer. If such was the plight of the rich, what was happening to the poor can well be imagined. They had no food, clothing or money.

"There was very little water available on the way. The few sources of water that were there were being guarded by the military to prevent contamination. A cholera epidemic was on. And if the water sources got contaminated then all would have died. The roadside villages were selling water at five or ten rupees a glass. Those who had no money were deprived even of this. When they reached our camp they would say, "We are so thirsty, give us water. How much do we have to pay?" "You don't have to pay", we would say. "Don't have to pay!" They found it incredible.

"One day a small boy with large eyes came to me and said, "I am not able to trace my mother. If you allow me to stay, I shall find her." I said, "Stay." He stayed for two or three days, but could not find his mother. So he went away.

"Numerous trench latrines had been dug to meet the needs of the unending stream of refugees. There were two hundred sweepers to manage these. There arose a problem with the

feeding of the sweepers. The government refused to give them food. So they threatened to quit their jobs. I said, "That would be hell! I shall arrange for your food." Soon after I was down with fever and had to go to Gauhati to recuperate. One day I found the sweepers in front of me, all of them. "The place has been bombed," they said, "so we left." I was shocked. I had to return, despite my illness, and gather some people to help with the sweeping.

"Then our monks also started falling ill one by one. I had to ask them to leave. And there would be no replacement. Finally just two of us were left to manage the camp."

'I Have Kept a Sari for You'

Rain started from 17 November 1977. It was just a drizzle at first, then a slow shower, not uncommon in coastal Andhra Pradesh. But on the 19th it began to increase. By noon a strong wind had joined the heavy downpour and changed it into an ominous storm. By two o'clock it was physically impossible to go out. The deafening roar of the storm was frightening—doors and windows seemed to fly away, and the roof above seemed eager to follow them.

In his house Shyam and his wife stood up on the cot to save themselves from the tide that had burst in. As the water rose, Shyam made a hole in the roof and crawled to the top with his family. But the next moment the wind launched the roof over into the surging waters, where it began to float. Yamuna, Shyam's two-year-old daughter, was wrested out of her mother's hold and washed away. Wave after wave was coming from every direction.

The meteorological department had broadcast a storm warning, but the storm lashed the coast at 200 kilometres an hour, followed by a twenty-foot-high tidal wave that inundated no less than 350 square kilometres.

By three in the night the weather calmed down and next morning the innocent-looking sun rose—as though nothing had happened! The whole landscape was flat, covered with wa-



The fury of cyclone, Nellore 1979

ter. Not a tree, nor a pole, much less a house, stood erect. The devastation was complete.

The swami in charge of the Ramakrishna Mission's Rajahmundry centre immediately deputed a young monk and a novice to make a survey of the affected parts and to render whatever help was possible until further aid was rushed from headquarters and other nearby branch centres.

Help arrived from all corners. After weeks of round-the-clock toil providing primary relief, when the people were served with almost everything—food, clothing, medical aid, articles of daily use—and LOVE—the monks and volunteers took up a rehabilitation project on an unprecedented scale. In about a year's time 1,000 houses made from prefabricated cement blocks, community halls and children's parks with swings, see-saws and other game-accessories were in place across twelve villages. People belonging to every strata of Indian society had



Mass production of cement panels for cyclone-resistant houses, Puligudda, 1978



*Ramakrishnapuram: Post-cyclone housing,
Divi Seema, 1979*

contributed to make the Mission's project a spectacular success. The people even named their new villages after Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Vivekananda.

On the afternoon of the dedication of the villages, one of the monks, who was actively involved in the relief and rehabilitation work, was playing with the children, when he noticed a little girl of five standing alone.

'Won't you play?' he asked her.

'Will you write a letter for me? I don't know how to write,' said the girl.

'Oh yes, to whom do you wish to write?'

'To my mother.'

The monk got a postcard from his tent and, sitting on the ground, asked the girl, 'Now tell me what you want to write.'

The little girl dictated: 'Mummy, why are you not coming to us? You need not worry. We have got a new house, cattle, utensils—even books to read. The swamis gave us new garments today. I have kept a sari for you. Do come. Daddy, Ramu and Yamuna are all well. Everyone is happy in the village. Mummy, please come back.'

'Now tell me your mother's address.'

'Heaven. She is with God.'

'What do you mean, heaven?'

'Why? On the night the storm hit, Mummy fell ill. Later when I asked Daddy where she had gone, he said she had gone to heaven so that God could cure her and send her back.'

Tears welled up in the monk's eyes as he

looked at the little angel. Truth seemed so inhuman.

'Look there,' said the girl pointing to the blue sky, 'that is where Mummy has gone.'

'Yes, dearie, your mother will surely return', said the monk, choking back his tears.

'Why Don't You Build a Bridge?'

On 6 November 1996 a devastating cyclone hit the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh causing incalculable damage to life and property. The Ramakrishna Mission's primary-relief work was followed by a rehabilitation project of constructing cyclone shelters/community buildings on a remote island. By the time three such buildings were completed, however, the locals came up with a novel idea that would solve many of their problems once and for all if implemented.

Seeing the dedication and painstaking labour of the monks, the villagers asked, 'Instead of constructing these buildings all over the place, why not build a bridge to connect the island with the mainland? Then the mainland itself would serve as a big shelter house. We would also be able to easily transport our agricultural produce. People on the other side will get fresh fruits and vegetables cheaply throughout the year and that would improve our economic condition too.'

But it had not occurred to the monks that the villagers had other serious problems, about which people do not usually speak openly. One old man did voice these: 'Sir, our girls don't get



Vivekananda Bridge

good matches because boys of the mainland are reluctant to come to see them after crossing such a formidable river. Moreover, we don't have a school or even a health centre on the island, what to speak of colleges or hospitals. Please think of our prospects!

These were the words that persuaded the Mission to take up the challenge of building what is now the well-known Vivekananda Bridge across the Vruddha Gautami estuary. This was a first in the Mission's history and the first instance in India where an NGO has built a bridge for community use.

Since the task was completed within the stipulated time of two years and at a cost much less than the estimated budget of Rs 3 crore, it came in for high praise from the state government. Local people contributed spontaneously towards the majestic statue of Swami Vivekananda that stands at the entrance to the bridge on the mainland side. Subsequently, the Mission also laid a children's park around the statue. It is indeed a joy to see children playing at Swamiji's feet!

(To be concluded)



Gujarat Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Programme: Lessons Learnt

SUDHIR KUMAR

Building a culture of prevention is not easy. While the costs of prevention have to be paid in the present, its benefits lie in a distant future.

—Kofi Annan, 1999

Introduction

Disasters, natural or man-made, have affected every country at some point of time and India is no exception. Earthquakes continue to be one of the most devastating furies of nature. Humankind has known it and has made efforts to understand it since time immemorial. The works of Plato, Aristotle, the Greek geographer Strabo and the thirty-seven-volume *Historia Naturalis* of Pliny the Elder are some of the earliest studies that refer to earthquakes. There are similar references in the Indian Vedas, which represent the most ancient literature of the world.

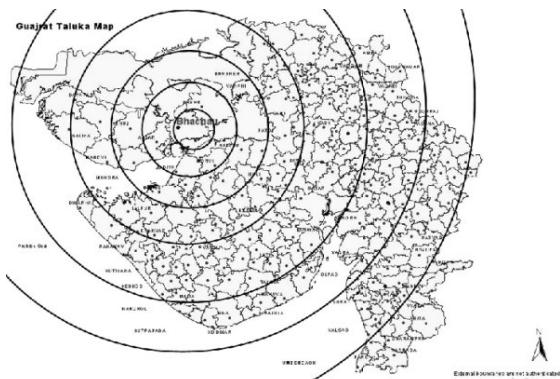
In fact, India is highly prone to multiple disasters due to several factors, which include geographical location and prevalent socio-economic conditions. About 68% of its total land area is susceptible to droughts, 60% is vulnerable to earthquakes of various intensities, and 6% is prone to cyclones. During the decade 1990-99, 4,344 people lost their lives annually due to disasters while 30 million were affected every year. In the recent past, it was hit by several devastating natural disasters such as earthquakes, cyclones, tsunami and floods.

The Gujarat earthquake of 26 January 2001 was one of the most devastating disasters faced by the country in the recent past. This disaster caused unprecedented damage to human life as well as property. The gigantic efforts of the state government in partnership with other stakeholders—the Government of India, other

state governments, various multilateral and bilateral agencies, NGOs, etc.—helped to bring life back to normalcy. Five years after the killer earthquake, when the reconstruction and rehabilitation programme is in its final lap, it is apt that we retrospect and look at the key lessons learnt from this programme. These lessons will come in handy for disaster managers during similar reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes in the future. Before drawing conclusions, it is important to understand the background of the programme.

Background

An earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale hit Gujarat on 26 January 2001. The



epicentre was located in Bhachau taluka of Kachchh district, about 270 km west of Gandhinagar, the state capital. The quake lasted for about two minutes, 25 seconds of which were marked by strong tremors. The effect of the earthquake was felt throughout the Indian subcontinent. This was followed by hundreds of aftershocks of magnitudes 3.0 and above.

Damage and Losses

The damage caused by this earthquake was unprecedented. 21 districts out of the 25 in the state, and 181 talukas out of 226 (including 42 very badly hit ones) were affected to varying degrees. The death toll was 13,805, and about 1,67,000 people were injured. Around 12 lakh homes were damaged or destroyed. Social infrastructure was also severely hit, with destruction or damage to over 1,000 health clinics and about 12,000 schools. With numerous office buildings and records destroyed and staff either killed or suffering loss of family members, civil administration was greatly affected. Physical infrastructure was also severely damaged, this including small- and medium-sized earthen dams providing drinking water and irrigation to local communities, urban and rural water-supply systems, public buildings, municipal infrastructure, roads, power and telecommunications. Thousands of small and cottage-based industries and agricultural assets were also destroyed or damaged.

The effect of the earthquake was spread over a 1,82,639 sq km area in Gujarat. This is 93% of the total land area of the state. The district of Kachchh was by far the most severely damaged, with around 70% of its buildings destroyed. Other seriously affected districts included Ahmedabad, Patan, Jamnagar, Rajkot and Surendranagar. These six districts accounted for over 95% of the deaths caused by the earthquake. Towns such as Bhachau and Rapar in Kachchh suffered near 100% damage. Towns and villages in the affected areas were reduced to piles of concrete and rubble, and thousands of people lost their livelihood. As the epicentre of the quake was in the sparsely populated north-western part of Gujarat, a disaster of even greater magnitude was averted. The quake affected some of the poorest regions of the state while the major industrial areas largely escaped damage.

The overall loss of assets as estimated by the Joint Assessment Team of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) is given in

Table 1.

SECTOR	ASSET LOSSES
Housing	5,166
Services	1,163
Education	670
Agriculture and livestock	544
Public buildings and monuments	339
Industry	339
Transport	321
Environment	256
Rural water supply	233
Health	219
Irrigation	186
Power	186
Municipal infrastructure	140
Ports	98
Telecommunications	51
<i>Total</i>	<i>9,911</i>

Table 1: Sector-wise asset losses (in crore rupees)

Apart from asset losses, indirect losses (or output losses) were estimated at Rs 3,000 crore, and the fiscal losses (secondary effects) were estimated at around Rs 10,100 crore.

Response

The state launched a massive reconstruction and rehabilitation programme with the support of the central government and various multilateral and bilateral funding agencies, including the World Bank and the ADB. This is the context in which the Gujarat Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Policy and the Gujarat Emergency Earthquake Reconstruction Programme (GEERP) were developed.

Objectives of the Policy: The short-term objective of the programme was to take up relief measures and provide temporary shelter to all the needy. The medium-term objective was to

restore the affected houses, infrastructure and livelihood and lay the foundation for long-term disaster-management measures. The long-term objective was to set up a permanent body for managing disasters. Another objective under this category was to bring in the culture of preparedness and disaster reduction in the state.

Guiding Principles: The mandate of the reconstruction and rehabilitation programme went beyond the immediate priorities of earthquake reconstruction and pursued broader social and economic issues impinging on household- and community-level development and empowerment. The programme aimed at involving people and representative institutions in the decision-making process and reflected their priorities and aspirations with regard to programme deliverables. The aim was to strengthen civil-society institutions like NGOs, community-based organizations and women's groups through partnerships and collaborations in the implementation process.

The participation of the private sector, NGOs and expert institutions became one of the cornerstones of the guiding principles of the programme. Structural and non-structural measures that were feasible and affordable and which merged with the culture, climate and lifestyle of the involved communities were incorporated in the guiding principles of the programme. This was to ensure the highest levels of transparency and accountability in programme implementation through appropriate institutional mechanisms and practices.

Programme Components: The GEERP included a number of components based on an objective assessment of the rehabilitation needs: (1) Housing; (2) Livelihood-support Programme; (3) Infrastructure Development; (4) Social and Community Development; (5) (Long-term) Disaster Management.

Key Lessons: Any project or programme has broadly two components: activities/tasks to be accomplished and the institutional arrangement (including human resources) to undertake these activities/tasks. The present paper

tries to capture the key lessons from both the components of the GEERP. Institutional arrangement is as important as the activities of the programme since the former creates the environment that facilitates delivery of the latter. It does not, however, claim or pretend to cover each component of this programme.

Institutional Arrangement

The Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA; now under the Gujarat State Disaster Management Act, 2003) was established on 8 February 2001, i.e. within fifteen days of the earthquake. It was registered as a society under the provisions of the Societies Registration Act and the Bombay Public Trust Act. The organization was mandated to implement the gigantic task of rehabilitation and reconstruction following the earthquake, and also to look after the long-term disaster-reduction initiatives and disaster-management capacity-building. The governing body of the GSDMA is headed by the chief minister and has 14 other members including cabinet ministers and secretaries of various departments. The decisions taken by the governing body of the GSDMA are treated at par with decisions of the state cabinet. The organisational hierarchy of the GSDMA is represented in Figure 1 (see next page).

In addition to this, a sub-committee headed by the chief secretary was also constituted. It was empowered to consider proposals other than those funded by the World Bank/ADB/any other funding agency. A state-level advisory committee was formed to help the government in formulation of policy for reconstruction and rehabilitation. Headed by Prof. Y K Alagh, it consisted of twelve other members from industry, NGOs, and educational institutions as well as other experts.

The structure was remarkable in its leanness and efficiency. As the governing body decisions were at par with cabinet decisions, policy decisions were made on time and at great speed. The chairmanship of the chief minister also

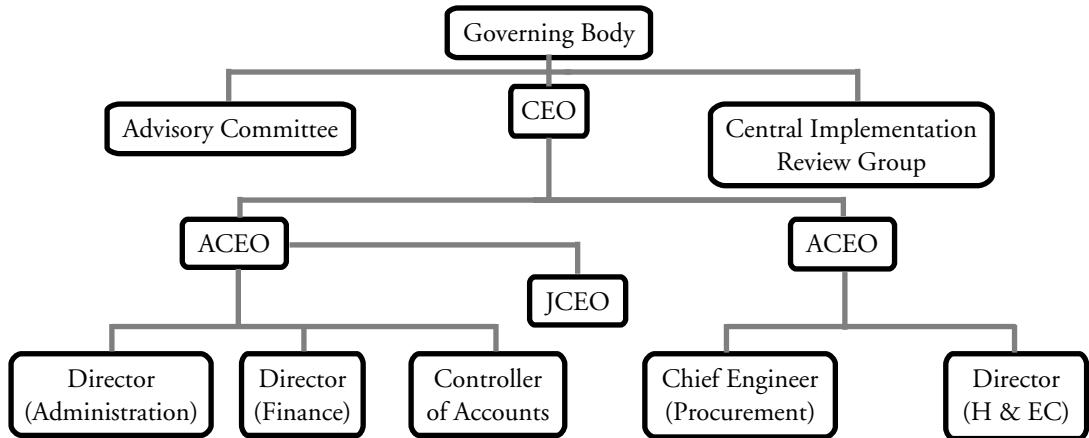


Figure 1

helped expedite matters. The sub-committee under the chairmanship of the chief secretary was responsible for better coordination among different departments as the entire reconstruction and rehabilitation programme involved a number of departments. The advisory group enabled the GSDMA avail expert advice and engage prominent citizens and experts in various fields to ensure people's participation, transparency and accountability. In sum, this institutional set-up facilitated participatory, hassle-free and speedy implementation of the programme.

Grievance Redressal Mechanism

A programme spread across 21 districts involving several million people is bound to provoke grievances among some people at the implementation level. Hence, to address these, a strong and decentralized grievance-redressal system was essential. Committees were constituted at the village and district levels for grievance redressal and for strengthening programme implementation. The village-level committee had a revenue official as chairman. The members included various prominent personalities of the village, including the sarpanch and a woman member. District committees were chaired by a minister. Members of this committee included various district-level government officials, and members of the parliament and

state legislative assembly.

In addition, the following arrangements were also made to strengthen the grievance-redressal mechanism: (1) District judge declared ombudsman and authorized to receive complaints directly from the public; (2) 1,800 legal literacy camps held to provide legal aid to victims; (3) Open houses conducted jointly by the Lokpal (ombudsman) and the district administration in worst-affected towns to settle grievances on the spot; (4) Grievances also redressed directly by the chief minister of the state once every month on *swagatonline*, a website for grievance redressal.

Activities/Tasks

A number of activities taken up under the GEERP are worth examining, but only some of the more important activities have been analysed here in order to derive suitable lessons.

Disaster Management Policy

Gujarat is vulnerable to disasters and hence it was felt that a proactive, comprehensive, and sustained approach to disaster management and a shift of focus from the earlier approach of relief and humanitarian assistance to prevention and mitigation was the need of the hour. The Gujarat State Disaster Management Policy, prepared in November 2002, was approved by the cabinet and is now in force. The

objectives of this policy are as follows:

- Assess the risks and vulnerabilities associated with various disasters.
- Develop appropriate disaster-prevention and -mitigation strategies.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders concerned with disaster management so that disasters can be managed more effectively.
- Develop and maintain a system for accession of resources, equipment, supplies and funding in preparation for future disasters.
- Ensure that arrangements are in place to mobilize the resources and capability for relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery from disasters.
- Create awareness and preparedness and provide advice and training to the agencies involved in disaster management and also to the community.
- Strengthen the capacities of the community and establish and maintain effective systems for responding to disasters.
- Ensure coordination with agencies related to disaster management in other Indian states and those at the national and international levels.
- Ensure relief/assistance to the affected without any discrimination of caste, creed, community or sex.
- Establish and maintain a proactive programme of risk reduction (this programme is being implemented in conjunction with the existing sectoral and inter-sectoral development programmes and is a part of the overall development process in the state).
- Develop and implement programmes for risk sharing and risk transfer for all types of disasters.
- Address gender issues in disaster management with special thrust on empowerment of women for long-term disaster mitigation.
- Develop disaster management as a distinct management discipline and create a systematic and streamlined disaster-management cadre.

Gujarat State Disaster Management Act

Apart from enforcing the disaster-management policy, the Gujarat government enacted the Gujarat State Disaster Management Act in March 2003 to provide a legal and regulatory framework for disaster management. This Act addresses the following deficiencies in earlier statutes that had a bearing on disaster management: (1) Absence of statutory empowerment of principal authorities such as the GSDMA, the State Relief Commissioner (SRC) and the district collector; (2) Absence of a clear definition of roles, functions and powers; (3) A largely reactive approach with less emphasis on mitigation activities; (4) Lack of integration between planning and disaster-management activities.

This Act is meant to pave the way for effective management of disasters by risk reduction and mitigation of consequences, for administering emergency relief during and after disasters, and for implementing, monitoring and co-ordinating measures for reconstruction and rehabilitation in the aftermath of disasters in the state of Gujarat. For these purposes it enables the government to establish the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority and to specify other agencies for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The Act incorporates current best practices from a variety of sources at the state, national and international levels.

The objectives and principles of the Act are as follows: (1) Clarify roles of principal entities in disaster management and all the stakeholders; (2) Shift emphasis from relief to comprehensive disaster management: mitigation, relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation; (3) Enable appropriate entities to use existing powers, authority and resources to implement the disaster-management framework and provides additional powers to collectors and the state relief commissioner wherever necessary; (4) Provide a framework for sourcing and utilizing funds and supplement existing legislation.

(To be concluded)

Birds in Buddhist Sacred Texts

DR SURUCHI PANDE

Introduction

Birds have made a deep impact on the lives of people. In ancient literature the soul was often compared to a bird. There are many mythological stories about birds. Our ancestors observed birds and their life cycles with a respectful attitude. From the ethno-ornithological point of view, it is interesting to note the references to birds in Buddhist literature. The *Jatakas* are an excellent piece of folk literature



preaching Buddhist moral principles. In the *Avadānakalpalata* and also in the *Jatakamala* there are references to birds like *śuka*, *harṣa* and *śatapatra*. As is well known, Buddhism

was first brought to

Tibet in the eighth century by Padmasambhava and got established there under king Songtsen Gampo. It is important to remember that for Tibetan Buddhism faith means a strong belief in the ability of all beings to attain enlightenment. One has to go further because getting enlightened is not an end in itself. The ultimate goal should be to lead all beings to that state of attainment. That is why the Bodhisattva returns to the world to preach until all beings get liberated. So the Bodhisattva is the most respected figure in Buddhism.

Not only do Buddhist religious texts take note of birds, but poems like those of the sixth Dalai Lama also provide unusually beautiful hints about birds. He says:

Marsh-loving geese
wished to stay,
Icy despair
sped them on their way.

Or

The cuckoo does come from Mon
[Himalayan foothills],
The yearly rains do now fall.
I have encountered love,
I rest well content.¹

Buddhist Principles behind the Birth Stories

Rebirth or reincarnation is something that attracts common people. Birth stories do not use any abstruse philosophical terms. Their concern is with general moral virtues and the unavoidable law of karma. As regards the process of rebirth, there are various views. Many Buddhists assume that a new birth follows promptly on death, but the followers of Padmasambhava believe in the concept of *bardo*, a state of existence between death and rebirth.

The story of a person does not begin with birth; it is actually an endless history in the making. The results of good actions survive even after the person is dead. In fact, rebirth stories of the Buddha explicitly assume a continuation of identity. It is also assumed that the new existence is neither absolutely permanent nor is it completely free from sorrow.



The Bodhisattva is identified with the main character of each particular *Jataka* story. Age after age he excelled himself in the practice of the *pāramitās* (virtues) and achieved Buddhahood. He has set a goal as well as the ideals of kindness and generosity before humanity. It is said that 'the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is par excellence the transformer of himself into the most varied shapes in his eagerness to succour men and to fulfil his vow to secure the release of

all beings. The shapes which may be assumed are not limited to Buddha appearance, though these are usual in the case of Buddhas, but any form may be chosen which serves the end aimed at.² Further: 'The Bodhisattvas ... appreciate reality; they are aware of their substantial identity with the body of the law, but they have not realized it as they are still conscious of their own identity. Though they are undefiled by the world, owing to their equipment of knowledge, they practise an equipment of merit which results in an unreal but purifying activity' (ibid).

Actions accumulated in the previous birth pass on to a new individual, who is the same individual, being the product of the same karma. The Bodhisattva is such an individual, continuously engaged in perfecting the *pāramitās*. He is the ideal man of the Mahayana doctrine. Since Buddha is one who is enlightened, Bodhisattva means 'enlightenment-being'. He is one who wants to become a Buddha. Bodhisattva is an embodiment of wisdom and compassion. He has made efforts for the good of others and wants to help others get out of suffering. So there is great importance given to merit and prohibition of evil.

 Bodhisattva is the symbol of a spiritual principle. He gives us hope by revealing himself in various forms of life. He possesses sanctity, and has the privilege of remembering his own past existences, and even those of others. This conviction is prominent in the Jatakas. The partridge, the parrot, the vulture, the pigeon, the cock and the ruddy shelduck are the common birds in the Jatakas and in the Tibetan text, *Precious Garland*. In the Jatakas the Bodhisattva himself appears in various avian forms, whereas in the Tibetan text the Bodhisattva is in the form of a cuckoo and all other birds from India and Tibet are his followers.

This study will focus on the birds in the *Precious Garland*. The references from the

Jatakas will form the backdrop. The *Precious Garland* opens with the birds from India and Tibet coming together to listen to the Dharma. This is suggestive of the communication that existed between the visiting scholars of the two countries.

It is an ancient practice to use birds as a medium for conveying philosophy and lessons in day-to-day morality in a simple and unassuming way to common people. It is suggested that when birds can discard their bad traits and habits, why can human beings not do the same? When birds can be enlightened, it is always possible for human beings to lead meritorious lives.

'The Dharma among the Birds: A Precious Garland'³

When one gets acquainted with the basic principles of Buddhism, it is not difficult to appreciate Buddhism among birds in a poetic setting. In Buddhist philosophy all-inclusiveness is not restricted to humans alone. It extends to all living creatures, both higher and lower than human beings. The theme of the *Precious Garland* is similar to that of the Jatakas. The work is anonymous and undated. It is opined that the particularities of language point to the seventeenth or eighteenth century as its possible time of origin; and the theme of the book suggests closeness to the tenets of the Kagyupa (or Bla-brgyud-pa) sect. The Tibetan title is *Bys Chos Richen, Phren-ba* which literally means 'The Dharma among the Birds, a Precious Garland'.

The uniqueness of this text lies in its simplicity. Hardly any arcane or obscure Buddhist term is used therein. The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are



granted importance. The Holy Avalokita appears here in the form of a cuckoo.

There is a famous Tibetan story behind this form of the cuckoo, according to which the preaching cuckoo was actually an Indian prince.

He was the son of a king of Benares and a reincarnation of Avalokita. The prince was in love with one of his wives and he neglected the others. One of the wives,

named Svarasuti, complained to Lagāna. Lagāna was the prime minister's son and the prince's closest friend. Svarasuti motivated him to seize the throne and make her his queen. Lagāna agreed. He proposed to the prince a visit to an ancient pleasure garden in the woods across the river Mahajana. The unsuspecting prince agreed. Lagāna then procured the bodies of two dead cuckoos, fresh and without wounds. He coaxed the prince to enter one of these bodies. The prince hesitated for a moment because he thought that such 'transmigration' was the 'secret teaching of the Brahmins and is not meant for amusement'. But then he consented.

The prince, now in the cuckoo's frame, enjoyed the beauty of the dense forest and the fruits that grew there. In the meantime Lagāna returned secretly to the opposite bank. He entered the prince's body and threw his own body into the river. Then he pretended to be depressed and said that his dear friend Lagāna had jumped into the river. People mistook him for the prince and believed his story.

Meanwhile the real prince wanted to rejoin his friend and began searching for him. He flew to the other bank but could not see the bodies they had left there. Now he understood what Lagāna had done. The prince was horrified. He spent the night on the top of a tree. When he was about to fly to Benares, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara joined him. The Bo-

dhisattva was in the form of a cuckoo too. He consoled the prince and asked him to stay back and preach to the birds while he had the form of a bird.

The prince had discussions with the parrot, who was the king of the birds, about the Holy Doctrine. Gradually he addressed the other birds too regarding the Dharma.

Back in Benares, the beloved wife of the prince doubted the identity of her 'husband' and she was driven out by Lagāna. After many years the prince himself became a Bodhisattva. He got back his original body and regained his kingdom. But having already attained enlightenment, he could not enjoy the transient pleasures of the world. So he soon renounced his kingdom and died in a remote place.

Soul Transference

In the Tibetan context, the practice of 'soul transference' refers to the occult techniques of the Kagyupa school. This sect is traced back to the Indian yogis Tilopa and Naropa. Marpa and Milarepa were its Tibetan exponents.

In *Buddha's Law among the Birds* (55, 56), a legend about soul transference involving Marpa is given. The story relates how Marpa abandoned his body and gave life to a pigeon, but then again, Marpa got up and the pigeon fell down. This story can be interpreted in various ways.

In Buddhism it is believed that the *asura*, *preta* and *piśāca* forms do not have any possibility of getting nirvana.

Devas are long-lived, and they cherish and get entangled in the satisfaction of desires. Hence this *gati* or destiny was also considered unfavourable. But human and animal existences are compatible with the achievement of nirvana. *Tiryak-gati*, invertebrate existence, is inferior but still has this po-



tential for nirvana. Perhaps the secret knowledge of soul transference could be used to choose a rebirth according to one's wish by reanimating a fresh corpse at the time of death.

In the *prahasana* (farcical drama) named *Bhagavadajjukiyam* there is a story of a *parivrajaka* (monk) and his disciple named Shandilya completely based on the theme of *para-kaya-pravesa* (entry into another's body) and narrated in a very amusing style.

Birds of the *Precious Garland*

The anonymous author begins the narration by describing a beautiful wooded mountain situated on the border between India and Tibet. It was named Pleasant Jewel. All around the foot of this mountain lived king vultures and various eagles. There were also water birds like geese, swamp birds and black terns. The dense forest was adorned with peacocks, parrots, thrushes and crows.

The Holy Lord Avalokita had transformed himself into a cuckoo and had performed penance for many years under a large sandalwood tree. Avalokiteshvara is a great and compassionate Bodhisattva. He gave the world the mantra *Om mani padme hum*. It is believed



that the Dalai Lama is the reincarnation of Avalokiteshvara. In the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* he is described thus:

Strong in fine knowledge,
Avalokitesvara surveys

Beings afflicted by countless ills,
And by many ills oppressed.
He thus becomes the saviour of the world
with its gods.

And

His voice is like that of a cloud or a drum;
Like a rain cloud he thunders,
sweet in voice like Brahma.
His voice is the most perfect that can be
So one should recall Avalokitesvara.⁴

The parrot came and paid his respects to the cuckoo and requested him to teach the Dharma to the birds. He assembled Indian as well as Tibetan birds. Indian birds were the followers of the peacock and Tibetan birds followed the vulture. Cuckoo, the Great Bird, said:

I have surveyed this ocean of samsara
And I have found nothing substantial in it.
Reflect in earnest on impermanence
and on death, coo!
Commit in no way any evil deed, coo!
Release within yourselves
good and wholesome thoughts, coo!

The cuckoo thus preached the highest truths and asked other birds to express their thoughts.

Cuckoo, the Great Bird

We may try to analyse why the cuckoo was selected as the preacher of the great Dharma. Edward Conze opines that 'Buddhists in general are apt to regard family life as stuffy and depressing'. Here the parasitic behaviour of the cuckoo is emphasized. He has further stated that for the Japanese the cuckoo is a symbol of grief and its song represents the plaint of parted lovers. But there are other references from the Lama and Bon religions. For instance: 'The cuckoo is a holy bird for the Bon and they named it "the turquoise bird", which is the king of birds. It inspires the shamans and is described as having a lively voice, like that of the *kokila*.' In Conze's book we get the illustration of a Bon god along with 'a small bird, with a blue breast, [that] sits on a tree, hidden between a branch and the trunk, and there it shamanizes'

(50).

Thus in the Tibetan tradition the cuckoo was intuited as having magical powers. For Buddhists, its sound is evocative of the six-verse text, 'The Cuckoo's Song of Total Presence'. This text is concerned with *dzogchen*, the universally permeating, non-dual, non-discursive, radiant, spontaneous and free nature of the mind.

The cuckoo appears prominently in the traditional depictions of the Karma-pa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, specially in the context of birth legends. Noting the analogy of the cuckoo chick being reared in other birds' nests, the sixteenth head of the Karma-pa foresaw his own going to India. It is also said that a cuckoo landed on the tent in which the seventeenth Karma-pa head was taking birth and sang its song of good omen. In addition to this, in Tibetan folklore the cuckoo is a welcome and auspicious bird indicating warm weather.

The cuckoo here is probably the Asian koel. The male displays glazed bluish-black colour and remains silent in winter. In summer it calls from dawn to dusk and sometimes even up to midnight. The call goes *ku-oo, ku-oo* in a crescendo.

Other Lesser Birds

As noted earlier, it is the parrot that makes the Great Bird speak. The parrot is described as being 'skilled in speech'. It expresses its thoughts by saying:

The effects of many misdeeds in our past,
Have tied us to this suffering, bound us,
chained us.

The rose-ringed parakeet and the plum-headed parakeet were popular cage birds. They were trained to talk and perform tricks. The caged life of the parrot has been used by poets as a simile for human confinement and suffering. Plum-headed parakeets were once trained to recite Buddhist maxims and such birds were called *śākyā-śāsana-kuśala*.^{5,6} The parrot is believed to represent the two early masters, Kawa

Peltsek and Choro Lu'i, who first rendered the Buddhist scriptures into Tibetan from Sanskrit. In the Mahashuka Jataka,⁷ Bodhisattva was the king of parrots who showed the virtue of loyalty.

After the parrot, the king vulture expressed its thoughts by saying:

One must know that born, one cannot stay,
That one must die.

The vulture has a mythological status in Buddhist literature. One of the five hills near Girivraja or Rajagriha is known as Gridhrakuta, Vulture Hill. When Ananda was meditating on this hill, Mara tried to disturb him by appearing in the form of a vulture. In order to save Ananda, Buddha, who was meditating in a nearby cave, put his hand on Ananda's shoulder after having made a cleft in the rock with his supernatural power. It is said that the crack and the footprint of the vulture can still be seen. In Hindu mythology, the vulture is one of the assistants of Yama, the Lord of Death.

(To be concluded)

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Ramakrishna: His Name and the Science of Japa

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

The Method of Repeating Japa

During initiation the guru instructs the disciple in the method of repeating japa. If the disciple does not believe in and follow the guru's instructions, he or she will make no progress in spiritual life. Meditation is not so easy. Various worldly thoughts create restlessness in the mind and do not allow it to concentrate on God. That is why in the beginning one should practise japa for some time. Japa is the repetition of the mantra or God's name with a corresponding effort to hold Him in the mind. Krishna says in the Gita, 'Of sacrifices I am the sacrifice of japa.'

Most people complain: 'Our minds are restless. What shall we do?' The scriptures answer: 'Control the mind by repeated practice and by detachment.' Holy Mother said that the mind could be controlled if one repeated one's mantra fifteen to twenty thousand times a day. Swami Shivananda wrote in a letter (16 June 1922):

'An important and yet easy way of concentrating the mind is this: Sit before Sri Ramakrishna's picture, keep your eyes fixed on him, and start repeating his name. While you do so, have the firm belief that Sri Ramakrishna is looking at you, that he is listening to you repeat his name, and that the only purpose of his sitting there is to help you. Do this and you will see your mind becoming calm. You will find your trust in him growing, and you will also have peace of mind.'¹³

One can practise japa in many ways. For example, one can utter the mantra with audible sound (*vācika*), or with a gentle sound so that only the chanter can hear (*upāṁśu*), or mentally (*mānasika*). Some repeat the mantra while

counting with a rosary or between the joints of the fingers. Some people practise japa by focusing on each centre of the kundalini. Some connect their mantra with their breath. The scriptures say that human beings are continuously repeating a mantra as they breathe. When one inhales, it sounds like 'so'; when one exhales, it sounds like 'ham'. These two words are combined to form 'so-ham' (*sah aham*), which means 'That I am'. Its reverse form is 'ham-sa' (*aham sah*) 'I am That'. All human beings knowingly or unknowingly are always repeating 'so-ham' and 'ham-sa'. This is called the Hamsa mantra; it is also called the Ajapa Gayatri.

Various spiritual aspirants experimented with methods of focusing on God. They recorded the results of their sadhanas in the scriptures. For example, one can turn the mind inward very quickly by repeating the mantra while focusing on the six centres of the kundalini. An aspirant should repeat the mantra a certain number of times on each centre beginning with muladhara (at the base of the spine) and ending with sahasrara (at the crown of the head) and then returning from there to anahata (at the heart). Thus one should go on repeating the mantra while focusing the mind on the Chosen Deity. Shakti dwells at muladhara, and Shiva at sahasrara, so this method of japa unites Shiva and Shakti. It is called Brahma-tattwa, or true yoga.¹⁴

The Tantric scriptures mention another method: Hold the breath and imagine that your kundalini is rising from muladhara to sahasrara through the sushumna channel, and then immediately bring it back to muladhara. After practising this technique a few times, one will

notice a light like a flash of lightning, or a flame, or a glowing tube in the sushumna channel. The technique of concentrating one's mind on this flame is called meditation on the *mantra-śikhā*. Pandit Jaganmohan Tarkalankar, a famous Tantric teacher, writes: 'One should meditate on the guru in the sahasrara, the mantra at the root of the tongue, and the Chosen Deity in the heart. Then think that the guru, mantra, and Chosen Deity are luminous and that their light makes you luminous. Now repeat the mantra while focusing on the luminous form of your Chosen Deity in the heart.'¹⁵

When we study *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play* and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, we find that the Master practised various kinds of sadhana as described in various scriptures. He also practised some new disciplines that he invented himself. For example, he said to the devotees: 'During meditation, think that your mind has been tied to the feet of your Chosen Deity with a silk thread, so that it cannot run away. Why do I say a silk thread? Because those feet are extremely soft and delicate. It would hurt the deity if a different type of string were used.' Again, he said:

Should one think of the Chosen Deity during meditation only and then forget Him? Always try to keep part of your mind on the deity. You have seen how a vigil lamp is kept burning during Durga Puja. One should always keep a lamp near the deity; it should not be allowed to go out. It is inauspicious if a householder's lamp goes out. Likewise, after placing the Chosen Deity in the lotus of the heart, one's meditation should be like the flame of a vigil lamp. While performing household duties one should look inside from time to time to see if the lamp is still burning.¹⁶

Sri Ramakrishna once said: 'During my sadhana, before starting meditation on the Chosen Deity I would first imagine that I was washing the mind thoroughly. You see, there are various kinds of dirt and dross [bad thoughts and desires] in the mind. I would imagine that I was flushing out all impurities and placing the Chosen Deity there. Adopt this method' (435-6).

The restless mind loves to play. One can use japa to entertain the mind. For example, Ramakrishna's devotees who have visited the places connected with Ramakrishna and Holy Mother can repeat the mantra one hundred times while focusing their minds on the following: Ramakrishna's image at Kamarpukur and Holy Mother's image at Jayrambati; Kali, Krishna, Shiva, the Master's room, the Naha-bat, and the Panchavati of Dakshineswar; the Master's room at Cossipore; and the image of the Master at Belur Math. Thus a devotee can repeat the mantra a thousand times in one sitting.

During initiation, the guru advises the disciple to practise japa and meditation in the morning and evening, because nature becomes calm at the junctions between night and day, and between day and night. It takes steadfast devotion and regularity to make the japa effective. It is very important to make a habit of sitting at the same times. Suppose that a man eats breakfast at 8.00 a.m., lunch at 1.00 p.m., and supper at 8.00 p.m. He has followed this routine for forty years. His stomach is ready for food at those times. Similarly, if an aspirant sits for meditation at the same time every day, his or her mind will be ready for the presence of God. Gopinath Kaviraj, a scholar and mystic, says:

Maintain an exact time period for meditation. If you have decided to sit for meditation at 4.00 a.m., you must sit at that time. If that costs you money it does not matter. If there is an emergency that keeps you from sitting at that time, close your eyes and say, 'Lord, I am unable to meditate on you at this moment.' Even this one minute of recollectedness will be sufficient. To maintain the exact moment is a difficult task; but this habit brings God close to us. You can sit for long hours at other times, but don't forget your exact moment. You have seen how the Muslims say their prayers five times a day; they always maintain their schedule. Even during a journey, they will stop by the side of the road and say their prayers at the right time; they don't need a mosque. There are so many obstacles in one's spiritual journey! Strictly adhere to the exact time for meditation.¹⁷

Patanjali says: 'By making samyama [concentration, meditation, and absorption] on single moments and on their sequence in time, one gains discriminative knowledge.'¹⁸ Most people do not know the mystery of time. A person with a well-ordered life can accomplish more than someone without it.

When Swami Brahmananda was in Vrindaban, he took a vow that he would repeat his mantra at midnight. He later described how the spirit of a holy man awakened him from sleep:

At that time Turiyananda and I were living together and practising japa and meditation punctually. We did not talk to each other unless we needed to. At 8.00 p.m. we would eat some bread that we had gotten by begging, and then go to bed. Just at midnight we would get up, and after washing we would sit for meditation. One night while I was asleep, someone pushed me and said: 'It is twelve. Will you not sit for meditation?' I immediately got up. I was a little groggy. I thought that Turiyananda had broken my sleep, but he informed me that he had not. Quickly I finished washing and sat for meditation. I saw a Babaji [a Vaishnava saint] repeating his mantra silently in front of me. I was a little frightened when I saw him. As I repeated my mantra, I looked at him from time to time. As long as I was seated on my carpet, I saw him standing, repeating his mantra. Later I used to see him daily repeating his mantra in the same way.¹⁹

How to Cultivate Taste for Japa

We chant God's name, but we do not enjoy its taste, and it does not intoxicate us. We sit in our shrines in the morning and evening, mechanically repeating our mantra with a rosary, but do not get any joy. So we quickly leave the shrine and make ourselves busy with other activities. Patanjali says: 'One becomes established in God-consciousness when practice has been cultivated for a long time, uninterruptedly, with faith and devotion.'²⁰ Controlling the mind does not come in a day, but by long and sustained practice. One needs patience to enter the inner spiritual world by way of japa. Suppose that one afternoon a man enters a

movie house after the film has started. He sees dark all around, except for the red emergency-exit signs and the light from the screen. After staying a while, he slowly begins to see the rows of chairs and can find his seat. Similarly, the darkness of the heart is lighted by japa and meditation. Then one gets joy. The great saint Tulsidas said: 'As a lamp placed at the threshold of a room lights both the inside and the outside of the room, so the chanted name of Rama illuminates us inside and outside.'

Spiritual disciplines without passion are as flavourless as curry without salt. As cows love fodder mixed with oil cakes, so people enjoy spiritual life if they chant God's name with devotion. The great sage Vyasa said: 'When one has a bile-secretion disorder, sugar does not taste good. But if one goes on taking sugar earnestly every day, one gradually begins to enjoy the taste of sugar and the disease goes away. Similarly, the name of God may not appeal to those who are in ignorance. But if one practises spiritual disciplines regularly, ignorance disappears and a taste for the Divine Name is acquired.' Sometimes influenza weakens a person's sense of taste; but one can taste a little if some pickle is added to one's food. Love for God is like that pickle. A drunkard loves to hear about wine. His mind dances with joy when he sees a bottle of whisky or vodka. His roseate intoxication starts the moment the cork of the bottle is opened. He drinks the whole bottle with great joy. At last he forgets the world and falls down unconscious on the sidewalk. In fact, one can enjoy a similar roseate intoxication by chanting God's name. Ramakrishna used to say: 'Only repeating the word "siddhi" will not produce intoxication. You must actually get some hemp, rub it in water, and then drink the solution. ... Since you are going to lead a householder's life, create a roseate intoxication in your mind with the thought of God. You will be doing your duties, but let that pleasant intoxication remain with you.'²¹

We do not like to hear the names of people whom we abhor, but we love to hear the names

of our loved ones. Loving relationships bring the taste of joy to us. Rupa Goswami writes in his *Vidagdha Madhava*: 'I do not know how much nectar is in that two-syllable word, *Krish-na*. I am not content chanting His name with one mouth; I wish I had a million mouths. I also want to have a million ears to hear His name. When this name vibrates in my mind, all my senses are overpowered.'

The Vaishnava scriptures emphasize that one should chant God's name with passion: This is the main discipline of the Vaishnavas. The devotee passes through several stages before attaining divine love: first, having faith; then seeking holy company; constantly chanting God's name, which removes all obstacles; then having steadfast devotion; tasting or experiencing sweetness; having attachment for God; being established in a spiritual mood; and finally attaining divine love. Chaitanya said: 'Jive dayā nāme ruci vaisnava sevan; Ihā binā dharma nāi śuno Sanātan. Listen, O Sanatan, there is no other dharma than practising compassion for all living beings, love of God's name, and service to devotees.'

Ramakrishna and the Divine Name

Five hundred years ago Chaitanya taught how to chant the name of God. Everyone has the right to chant His name. Among devotees, there is no difference between rich and poor, learned and illiterate, brahmin and pariah. One of the mantras which Chaitanya repeated was:

Rāma Rāghava Rāma Rāghava
Rāma Rāghava pābī mām;
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa rakṣa mām.

Moreover, there is a famous Vaishnava mantra with thirty-two letters:

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa,
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare,
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma,
Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

Akshay Sen wrote about Ramakrishna's instruction concerning the divine name:

The human mind is possessed by impure

thoughts, as if by an evil spirit. To purify the mind, one should continually repeat God's name with simple faith. This is the easiest means. Ramakrishna said again and again: 'There is infinite glory in God's name. The name is the seed; the name is the tree; and the name is the fruit. God dwells in His own name.' People generally do not care for verbal instruction, so in order to teach people, Ramakrishna used to chant God's name and dance rhythmically, clapping his hands in the morning and evening. He would become so intoxicated that his chanting led him to samadhi. Although one can attain samadhi after severe austerities throughout many lives, the Master proved that it could also be attained by chanting God's name. According to Ramakrishna, Narada's way of devotion is to chant, sing, and hear God's name. In this Kali-yuga, Narada's way of devotion is the best means for God-realization.²²

As loud music does not allow us to hear each other's conversation, so loud kirtan overpowers worldly desires. It is said that the Divine Name devours lust. Ramakrishna advised his disciple Yogananda to chant God's name as an antidote to lust.

Ramlal said that in the mornings and evenings Sri Ramakrishna used to dance, chanting the names of the Lord: 'Jaya Govinda, jaya Gopālā'; 'Kesāva Mādhava Dīna-dayālā'; 'Hare Murāre Govinda, Vasudeva-Devaki-nandana Govinda'; 'Hare Nārāyaṇa Govinda he'; 'Hare Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva'.²³

M said: 'Late in the evening the Master would chant this mantra, "Brahma-māyā-jīva-jagat". One can attain perfection or see God by repeating this mantra. The Master said, "This is a mysterious mantra."²⁴

When Ramakrishna visited Balaram's home or that of any other devotee, he would chant God's name. Visitors would later remark: 'How this Paramahamsa chants the Divine Mother's name! It penetrates the heart.'²⁵

The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* records the many ways in which the Master chanted the names of gods and goddesses:

Kṛṣṇa he Dīnabandhu! Prāṇa-vallabh! Govinda!
Hā Kṛṣṇa! He Kṛṣṇa! Jñāna Kṛṣṇa! Prāṇa Kṛṣṇa!

Buddhi Kṛṣṇa! Mana Kṛṣṇa! Deha Kṛṣṇa!
Prāṇa he Govinda, mama jīvan.
Saccidānanda! Saccidānanda! Saccidānanda!
Kāraṇānanda-dāyīni! Kāraṇānandamayī!
Hari bol, Hari bol, Harimay Hari bol,
Hari Hari Hari bol.
Rām, Rām, Rām, Rām, Rām, Rām, Rām.
Jaya jaya Durge, jaya jaya Durge.
Sahajānanda, Sahajānanda.
Om Kālī, Om Kālī.
Kālī Brahma, Brahma Kālī.
Mahā-Kālī, Nitya-Kālī, Śmaśān-Kālī,
Rakṣā-Kālī, Śyāmā-Kālī.
Brahma-Ātmā-Bhagavān,
Bhāgavat-Bhakta-Bhagavān,
Guru-Kṛṣṇa-Vaisnav,
Brahma-Śakti, Śakti-Brahma.
Veda, Purāṇa, Tantra, Gītā, Gāyatrī.
Śarāṇāgata, śarāṇāgata.
Nāham nāham, tuhun tuhun.
Ami yantra tumi yantri.
Hari Om, Hari Om!
Om, Om, Om, Om, Om, Om,
Om Kālī!
Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa! Kṛṣṇa Saccidānanda.
Om Saccidānanda!
Govinda, Govinda, Govinda!
Yogamāyā!
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa! Gopī-Kṛṣṇa, Gopī, Gopī!
Rākhāl-jīvan Kṛṣṇa.
Nanda-nandana Kṛṣṇa, Govinda, Govinda!
Śrīmat Nārāyaṇa, Śrīmat Nārāyaṇa,
Nārāyaṇa, Nārāyaṇa!
Jagannāth, Dīnabandhu, Jagabandhu.
O Mā, O Mā, Brahmamayī.
Mā, Mā, Rājēśvarī.

Ramakrishna never cared for monotonous life. His personal experience taught him that

God has many names. One can reach God by following any one of those names. One day at Dakshineswar the Master was humming 'Gaur, Gaur', a name for Gauranga. Someone asked: 'Sir, you repeat Mother's name. Why are you chanting Gaur's name?' The Master replied: 'What can I do? You people have wife, son, daughter, money, but I have only God. So, sometimes I say Gaur, sometimes Ma, and other times Rama, Krishna, Kali, or Shiva. Thus I spend my time.'²⁶

(To be concluded)

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The chanting of the name of the Lord purifies both the body and the mind. Have intense faith in the power of God's name and meditate on Him. If you chant His name, all your bonds will be broken, and you will become fearless. You will find immortality. —Swami Brahmananda



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

Īśa Upaniṣad Revisited. *N Srinivasagopalan.* Oupaniṣada Publications, 4-159/42 (Plot No. 42), HMT Bearings Officers' Colony, Sainikpuri, Secunderabad 500 094. 2004. xxx + xxviii + 588 pp. Rs 250.

The central message of the Upanishads is to discover within oneself the Unmoved Mover, integrated within and without. Universality is the theme of all progressive thinking today, and so the Upanishads stand in the forefront of all progressive thought in the modern world. Man, who has been completely submerged in nationalistic, racial, sectarian or various other forms of limiting milieus, needs to be redeemed. For this we need the Vedantic message and the blessings of Swami Vivekananda.

The *Isha Upanishad* is no exception. It is regarded as the first among the Upanishads. All great thinkers of India, ancient and modern, have derived inspiration from it. Its first verse takes us at once to the secret depths of Truth: 'Īśāvāsyamidaṁ sarvam yatkiñcā jagatyāṁ jagat; Tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā mā grdbhā kasyasviddhanam. Whatever there is changeable in this ephemeral world, all that must be enveloped by the Lord. By this renunciation, support yourself. Do not covet the wealth of anyone.'

This is a very profound utterance, unequivocal and yet extremely simple. The whole universe is filled with the spirit of God. Change is here, death is here, in every phase of life. There is no permanent base here on which we can safely erect the structure of our lives. But if we look within, we shall discover the golden Truth in the midst of the many—the immortal and imperishable Self behind the mortal and perishable. The world is nothing but the blissful Brahman; and we are here to enjoy it. This is the true joy of life. It is growth, it is development, it is realization for man. It is fulfilment, *pūrṇatā*, the goal of evolution itself.

Īśa Upaniṣad Revisited is quite an ambitious production, considering the fact that the Upanishad is one of the shortest. The mantras here are very short but pregnant with the central message of Vedanta.

This book faithfully explains the principles revealed in the other Upanishads, the *Brahma Sutras*, the *Bhagavadgita* and other literature; so its approach is comprehensive.

The text also serves as a guidebook for self-study and practice of the Upanishadic way of life. Effort has been made to make the book as reader-friendly as possible. The language is simple. Each chapter opens with an introduction, the text of a mantra and its meaning. This is followed by an explanation of the words of the mantra and their implications. In many places reference is made to other supporting authorities, which are reproduced at the end of the chapter. Another interesting feature is Appendix D, where the vital points of Upanishadic living have been explained in the form of a Vedantic meditation exercise.

The author has rightly pointed out that a purely intellectual familiarity with the contents of his book may help one to be a learned person, but unless one puts into practice what one studies, no real benefit can be derived. This is also the universal message of the rishis of the Upanishadic age.

The numerous quotations from Shankaracharya's commentary on the *Isha Upanishad* and from the *Bhagavadgita* have added a valuable dimension to the book. Indeed, it brings a new lease of life to those who are still searching for the elixir of life. The author rightly deserves praise for bringing out such a valuable guidebook for seekers of Truth.

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Rg Vedic Sūktas: Gāyatri and Others—A Contemplative Study. *Swami Amritananda.* Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. E-mail: srkmath@vsnl.com. 2003. vi + 82 pp. Rs 15.

The eminent Tamil scholar, S K Ramarajan, used to say that Sanatana Dharma has been sustained by many avatars, the latest being the Ramakrishna

Math. Here one may add that the collective aspiration of a nation brought forth the manifestation of this avatar, which has been a divine instrument in disseminating the very best of our cultural recordings through commentaries, translations and fresh editions of our scriptures. Swami Amritananda's slim volume comes literally as a ray from the sun to illumine us. He takes us back to our beginnings only to assure us that the Vedas are of immense contemporary relevance.

‘*Gāyantāṁ trāyate iti gāyatrī*; It guards those who recite it, hence the term *gayatri*.’ As Swami Amritananda rightly says, the Gayatri is the maha-mantra found in the foremost of the Vedas, the Rig Veda. Technically, its recitation is essentially the worship of *saurāgni*, the solar effulgence, which was ‘used in ancient times most effectively in imparting character-building, man-making education’. A prayer is meant to bring the devotee and the deity close to one another and the Gayatri prayer invokes the powers of the *saurāgni* to illumine our entire being!

Swami Amritananda has mastered the enormous literature on this prayer and given the gist in a capsule form. We learn that the rising sun is the deity Savitṛ, the *gayatri* metre is known as the mother of all metres, and the various terms used to denote the sun indicate subtle differences in significance. Commentators assure us that the Gayatri helps us realize Brahman, while the *Chhandogya Upanishad* says Gayatri is Brahman. Each letter of the chant is also explained by Swami Amritananda in tune with received tradition. Two companion suktas to Surya have been chosen for this book and they culminate in the nectarean prayer to the ‘bright rays’: ‘*Adyā devā uditā sūryasya nirainhasah*; This day, O Gods, while Sūrya is ascending, deliver us from trouble and dishonour.’ The cover is indicative of ‘the orange skies of the mystic mind’, and is apt for this most welcome contemplative study.

Dr Prema Nandakumar
Researcher and Literary Critic
Srirangam

Stories from Bhaagavatham. Dr V Gouri Suresh. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in. 2004. xxxii + 334 pp. Rs 300.

The Bhagavata is the most celebrated of our Puranas and Dr Gouri Suresh has done us a

great service by rewriting the devotional stories of the scripture in an abridged form. Her stories can be enjoyed by old and young alike.

As Dr Sukumar Azhikode points out in his foreword, the Bhagavata is the most famous text among the great Puranas, which deal with divine legends and stories of mythical kings and sages. He further points out: ‘The heart and intellect of the land have been captivated all along by the magnificent exploits of Lord Krishna which constitute the main theme of the Purana. A huge volume written in 12 cantos (called Skandhas), in 335 adhyayas (chapters) and in about 18000 stanzas, it is held in great veneration by Indians as a whole.’ This Purana, like the great epics of Valmiki and Vyasa, is a great source of consolation and inspiration for the entire country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari.

Dr Suresh has cast her net wide enough to include all the well-known stories, including those of Dhruva and Prahlada, from all the twelve cantos. She has also included a few episodes from the Mahabharata. Altogether, there are 164 sections, beginning with Suta’s meeting with Shaunaka and ending with the former’s conclusion of his discourse.

The transliteration in the book is all wrong. The South Indian practice of writing the Sanskrit *ta* as *tha* (for example, *srimati* as *srimathi*) has adversely affected even the title of the book. The clumsy way of writing *aa* could easily have been avoided with a diacritical mark, *ā*. Some spellings also are not correct.

We are happy, however, to say that readers will find Dr Suresh’s lucid stories interesting and their morals useful in everyday life.

Dr Visvanath Chatterjee
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Origin of Universe: Vedic Approach. C Dakshinamurti. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. 2004. xvi + 128 pp. Rs 140.

The subject matter of this book, the beginnings of Creation, has fascinated human thinking for a long time. There is hardly any culture or civilization without its own model of how the universe came into existence. All these models are speculations of the human mind and therefore appear to take the colouring of mythological beliefs. There are only two models that can lay claim to rational speculation. They are the Vedic model and the scientific

model (or the big bang model). This book claims to present the Vedic model and compare it with modern theories of cosmology.

One opens the book with a sense of anticipation, to learn how these two models could be reconciled. There is a lot of information available about the concepts of Vedanta, but very scanty description of the Vedic model of the origin of the universe. Unfortunately, one is left with a sense of un-fulfilment for several reasons. The author is a highly qualified person in the field of science. He has several publications to his credit and an enviable record of achievement. So one tends to expect an in-depth analysis. In the first chapter itself, he has quoted from the *Mandukya* and *Taittiriya Upanishads* about the sequential process of evolution. However, he does not follow it up in detail.

There is a glaring omission in this book, namely the model of Creation according to Sankhya. It is now recognized by many scholars that the Sankhya model of Creation could be as old as the Vedas themselves. Sri Krishna has borrowed heavily from this philosophy to describe the cyclical nature of the universe in the *Bhagavadgita*. The late S Chandrasekhar, a Nobel Prize winner in physics, once commented that he got attracted to Indian spiritual literature by this model of the Gita, which almost anticipates the modern big bang theory. The author could have incorporated these concepts of Sankhya and the Gita with great benefit in his exposition of the origin of the universe. This would have considerably added to the value of the book.

There are quite a few printing mistakes, which could have been avoided with a little more careful editing. As an introduction to the origin of the universe, the book fails to fulfil its promise. However, it is a good introduction to the basic concepts of Vedanta.

Dr N V C Swamy

Dean of Academic Programmes
Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana
Bangalore

Vivekananda: The Citadel of Power and Strength. *Swami Harshananda*. Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore 560 019. E-mail: *rkmblr_publi@vsnl.net*. 2004. 48 pp. Rs 5.

This booklet is an introduction to Swami Vivekananda's great life, which is, and will con-

tinue to be, a citadel of power and strength for everyone. Anyone who has donned the cloak of greatness has also gone through great struggle and suffering to finally emerge successful. This was also true of Swami Vivekananda's life, and the tremendous impact it generated will last for generations to come.

The author, known for his erudition, has successfully depicted Swami Vivekananda's massive personality in simple English in so brief a compass. Anything connected with Swami Vivekananda is welcome, for he is the answer to our many individual, social, national, and international problems.

Swami Satyamayananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

The Dictionary of the Esoteric. *Nevill Drury*. Motilal Banarsi das, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: *mlbd@vsnl.com*. 2004. viii + 344 pp. Rs 295.

Every religion has two sides to it. The first is the Exoteric aspect, which deals with its philosophy, theology and practices. This is the more popular aspect of all religions which is subscribed to by a majority of people around the world. At the same time, there is another aspect of religion, which is esoteric and not easily accessible to the common public. This part of religion has its own, less widely known, philosophy, theology and practices. Hinduism has its Tantras, Judaism its Kabbalah, Christianity its various lodges, and Islam its Sufism. These movements have grown parallel with the mainstream religious practices. But established and organized religions often look down upon these practices as inferior because of the secrecy attached to them.

In the recent years, a large mass of publications about the history and development of esoteric, mystical and occult practices have been brought out. It is not easy to understand and appreciate these esoteric practices, mainly because they are couched in cryptic language, using symbolic words. For instance, there are several books available on Tantra these days which take it for granted that the reader is fully aware of the technical terms used therein. This need not always be true. No doubt glossaries are provided in these books, but they help the reader only to a limited extent.

The book under review by Nevill Drury is a dictionary of terms used in the mystical and occult tra-

ditions of the world—assembled in one volume. Even though it was originally meant to confine itself to Western occult traditions, its scope has now been enlarged to include almost all occult traditions, Eastern and Western.

The book contains about 3,000 entries and a few sketches. It provides a description of the most common words found in esoteric literature. Not only have technical terms been described, but biographies of some prominent historic figures have also been included. Cross referencing has been simplified by printing in bold letters those words which are explained in detail elsewhere in the dictionary. There is a wealth of information here which has been collected painstakingly and methodically. This makes the book an excellent reference volume.

For those who are interested in the study of esoteric literature, the present book will serve as an excellent companion.

Dr N V C Swamy

Rosary of Saints. Meera S Sashital. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. 2004. xx + 324 pp. Rs 275.

Reading books like the *Rosary of Saints* is a refreshing experience. They open before us that inner realm, which, for most of us, lies in a severely malnourished state. Today the millennia-old bastion of Indian spiritual tradition, till now kept well guarded through a precisely detailed and clearly oriented value-based domestic life of the masses, is being unsparingly invaded by the hedonistic Western lifestyle and values. The morally debilitating sensuality and violence dished out by television channels, newspapers, and other media have turned once-happy homes into dens of suspicion, fear, hatred, frustration and depression. Downright sensuality has slowly made its way into the lives of people and is being accorded open acceptance. It has already left its frightening scar in the minds of men and women, especially the young. The purpose of human life itself is being slowly forgotten. At such a time, books like the *Rosary of Saints* come as so many beacons to help navigate the lives of the masses in the right direction. Who else, other than the great ones—the saints, can play the role of pathfinders for humanity?

A book is good company. It is full of conversation without loquacity. It comes to your longing with full instruction. ... It silently serves the soul without recompense. —H W Beecher

Meera Sashital says, 'I have tried in a simple way to bring to the readers the lives of the Saints which will enrich our lives and lead us on to the path of good conduct and God. Going through the string of lives of these great Saints will be like telling one's rosary beads which gives consolation and helps to penetrate within oneself.' True to the author's remark, this book is sure to make the readers stop and ponder over the quality of their own lives and attempt to improve themselves. It contains lives of seventy-seven saints from India and abroad. These life stories have been presented in an endearing manner, conveying exactly what each saint stood for. The focus is on the essentials and not the minute details.

Saints speak the same language everywhere—the language of universal love, of peace and harmony, of renunciation and self-control. And when we read their lives, we too unconsciously imbibe the virtues they stood for; and for the time being, as it were, we breathe in their presence. This is a timely and highly recommended book. Thanks to Meera Sashital for keeping before the readers a good book which would help the readers see the lives of the great ones, contrast it with the present social scenario, *and think*.

Swami Shuddhidananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

Books Received

Asmi. Nagesh D Sonde. 318, Raheja Crest 3, Link Road, Andheri West, Mumbai 400 053. E-mail: ndsonde@hotmail.com. 2005. 194 pp. Rs 300.

Nagesh Sonde takes an intimate look at the *knowledge* traditions associated with Gautama Buddha and Ramana Maharshi to rediscover the *wisdom* they encapsulate. A narrative that is at once erudite, insightful, and eminently readable.

The Modern Hindu View of Life. Santosh Kumar Sen. 2 Manak Vihar, Delhi 110 092. 2005. 82 pp. Rs 150.

A brief personal reading of selected texts from the Upanishads, Gita, the Indian epics and Tagore in an attempt to outline what it means to be a Hindu.

Reports

News from Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad, organized a medical camp and an exhibition on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda at Triveni Sangam on the occasion of Magh Mela from 13 January to 13 February 2006. About 18,000 patients were treated at the medical camp and nearly one lakh pilgrims witnessed the exhibition.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built second floor of the monks' quarters building at **Ramakrishna Math, Cooch Behar**, on 25 March.

In recognition of the exemplary work done by Lokashiksha Parishad of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur**, for the promotion of rural sanitation in the country, the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, has conferred on it the 'Nirmal Gram Puraskar'. The award, consisting of a memento, a citation and Rs 50,000, was given by Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, President of India, on 23 March.

As a part of its diamond jubilee celebrations, **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai**, organized speeches, seminars, a teachers' workshop and inter-collegiate sports and literary competitions from January to March.

Achievement

Master Diptangshu Roychoudhury, a student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**, stood second at the All-India UN Information Test (senior category), conducted by the Council for UN Information, a wing of the United Schools Organization of India.

Foreign News

Three ashramas in Brazil—*Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta, Belo Horizonte*; *Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta, Curitiba*; and *Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta, Rio de Janeiro*—have been made sub-centres of **Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, Sao Paulo**.

Janab Sadeq Hossein, Mayor of Dhaka, spoke in a meeting held at **Ramakrishna Math, Dhaka**, as a part of the centre's 5-day Sri Ramakrishna birthday celebration, on 28 February.

Relief and Rehabilitation

Ramakrishna Mission headquarters and the following centres distributed 3,821 blankets to poor people affected by the severity of winter: **Contai**, 900; **Gol Park**, 700; **Headquarters**, 50; **Malda**, 650; **Muzaffarpur**, 521; **Ramharipur**, 500; **Sargachhi**, 500.

Ramakrishna Math, Baghbazar, distributed 338 blankets, 125 saris, 75 dhotis, 50 lungis, and 153 utensil sets among 170 families who lost their dwellings to a fire in Ultadanga, Kolkata, in March.

Another fire accident rendered 68 more families homeless in Khaskhol. **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda**, distributed 200 kg *chira*, 50 kg *gur*, 50 kg salt, 680 leaf plates, 68 utensil sets, 68 tarpaulin sheets and assorted garments among these families.

The undermentioned Ramakrishna Mission centres distributed various items to needy people as part of their distress-relief work. **Belgaum**: 86 wheelchairs; **Bhubaneswar**: 600 saris and 303 kg milk powder across 50 villages/slums; **Gol Park**: 325 tarpaulin sheets in Madurdaha; **Muzaffarpur**: 1,540 kg rice, 1,200 kg atta, 73 kg apples, 250 dhotis and 250 saris in Muzaffarpur district; **Sargachhi**: 160 saris in Murshidabad district.

Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, built 22 public toilets and installed 3 pump sets at Ramakrishnapuram in Nagapattinam district. ~